

Joseph Urban

By Otto Teegen

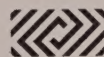
❖❖❖ JOSEPH URBAN, or more completely Carl Maria Georg Joseph, was born of Catholic faith in Vienna, May 26, 1872, the son of Josef and Helena (Weber) Urban. His father, a leading educator in Vienna, intended him for the law and some safe government position, but although he was enrolled in the law school, two years passed before it was disclosed he had been spending his entire time studying painting and architectural design at the Imperial and Royal Academy, and construction at the Polytechnicum. The discovery of this deception by his father, who was opposed to an artistic career, caused a definite break between them, and so at the age of eighteen he left home to begin his independent career.

Baron Hasenauer, at that time president of the Academy, finding the young Urban an exceptionally apt pupil, provided him with a scholarship and a place in his studio. So rapid was his progress that at the age of nineteen, with a year still to be completed at school, Hasenauer delegated him to go to Cairo to decorate the Abdin Palace for the young Khedive of Egypt. Returning to Vienna in 1892, he finished his architectural courses and entered an atelier, but, inspired by the leader Otto Wagner, who had departed radically from all period work and was striking out on entirely revolutionary principles, Urban decided to break away from the traditional ideas he had been taught at the Academy and carry on with his own.

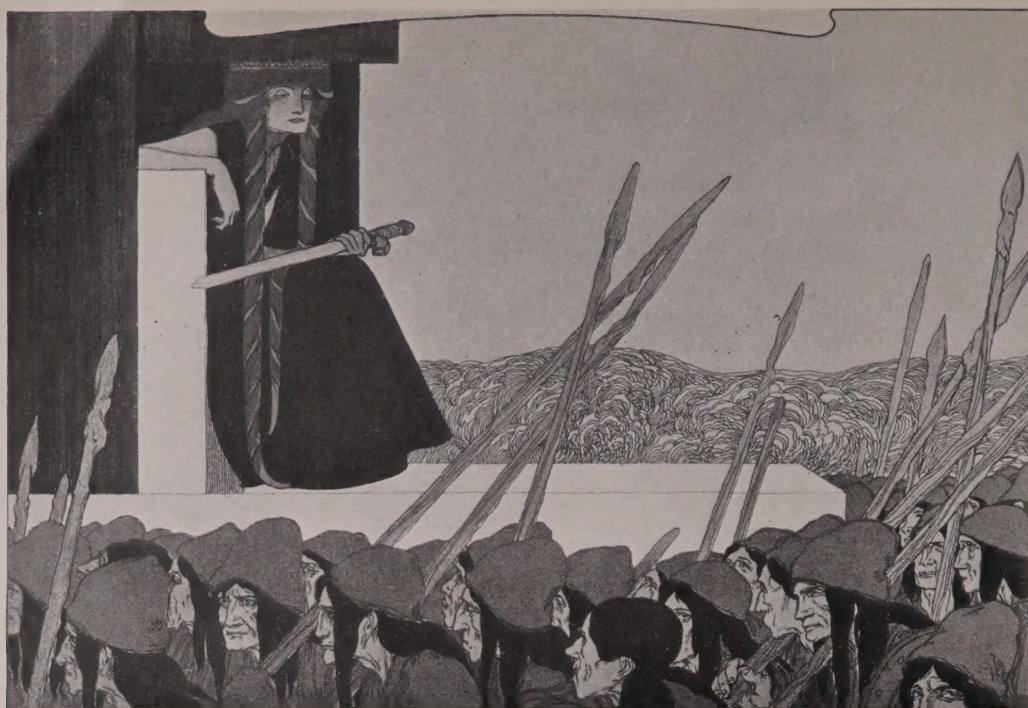
After a sketching trip through Germany he exhibited his richly filled sketch books at the Vienna Kunstler House, of which he later became a member, and through this association met Heinrich Lefler, for many years his collaborator and his lifelong friend. In 1896 he married Lefler's sister, Mizzi, and later of this union two children, Gretl and Elly, were born. With Lefler he worked on illustrations for several books, and for the "Mask of the Red Death" in

1896 won the Kaiser Prize, the highest prize—awarded only every fourth year—at the International Exhibit. It had never before been given to an architect. With this success the two men made a series of twelve Grimm Fairy Tales in color, for which Fuld the poet composed poems and which Munk the publisher printed in London.

The year 1898 saw Urban definitely embarked on his career as a modern architect, when his design was chosen out of one hundred in a competition for the general layout of a bridge connecting the Music Verein to the Concert Hall in Vienna. His departure from the accepted traditions in treating such a problem brought forth a storm of criticism, but since it was the first thing he had built alone, it gave him confidence and he decided to hold to his own architectural convictions. That same year he exhibited a new book with illustrations, Lefler collaborating, called "The Three Sisters." This won the Austrian Gold Medal for Fine Arts and was purchased by the German Government. Exhibited in Paris in 1900, it was awarded the Grand Prix.



Vienna, always alert to new ideas, was seething with esthetic discussions those days, and the time seemed imminent for revolt against the prevailing conservatism and classicism. The Kunst and Industry Exhibit held in 1898 set off the spark. Some of the designs for modern interiors were radical, so radical that the archduke, who was president, had to resign rather than allow the exhibit to open under his name. In reminiscing, Mr. Urban has said: "I remember the room Lefler and I did. It was so crazy that I can laugh at it today. But it was so full of good ideas and good craftsmanship that it made a big impression on Count Esterhazy, who was at the opening, and he ordered me to build a castle



An illustration from the fairy tale, "The Three Sisters," made by Joseph Urban in collaboration with Heinrich Lefler (1900). The book was awarded the Austrian Gold Medal for Fine Arts, and, exhibited in Paris in 1900, it was awarded the Grand Prix

near Hungary, which filled the next two years of my life." But the small group of radicals known as Secessionists carried the day, and in so doing changed the entire future of Austrian and European art.

The Paris Exposition in 1900 allowed the Secessionists to display their ideas to greater extent, and as director of the Austrian exhibit Urban received the Grand Prix in decoration as well as the Grand Prix for his own drawings. On his return to Vienna, however, he found his own artistic coterie in an uproar over the selection of paintings he had exhibited in Paris, and after lengthy arguments he and thirty-five others resigned from the Secessionists and formed the Hagenbund. As president of this organization, and to substantiate its principles, he converted the old Market Hall into an exhibition room, and for the formal opening succeeded in obtaining the presence of the Kaiser Franz Joseph. To have such a personage present meant the approval of the Ministerum and signified a real victory. The Hagenbund carried on for many years and exhibited both in Austria and abroad, especially at the Bavarian International Exposition of 1902, for which Urban, as director, received the Great Golden Staats Medal. The Hagenbund duties were arduous but he nevertheless continued to carry on his own practice, and during these years designed the Czar Bridge over the River Neva at Petrograd (awarded him after an international competition), the interior of the Municipal Building in Vienna, the Sani-

tarium of the Golden Cross in Baden, and several residences in Vienna and the suburbs.

It was in 1904 that he made his first visit to America, having designed the interior of the Austrian Pavilion at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, for which he was awarded the Grand Prize. Despite offers to remain in this country, he returned to Vienna where his work now took on a new trend; in this his architectural and decorative knowledge was brought to the theatre. He continued his architectural practice, however, and in 1908 won the competition for the festival to celebrate the fiftieth year of the reign of Franz Joseph.



His association with the Hagenbund, which was composed of musicians and actors as well as painters and architects, brought him into close contact with the stage, and it was not long before he was designing sets for the Burg Theatre and operatic productions for the Royal Opera. Beginning in 1904, he made designs for innumerable productions in theatres throughout Germany and Austria, and in 1910 for a production of "Pelléas et Mélisande" in Paris. In 1911 he was commissioned by the director of the new Boston Opera House to design three new productions, and in the fall of the next year he accepted the invitation to become the art director of that organization. Thus he came to America for the second time, and this time to

stay. Some believe that the work achieved at the Boston Opera represents his greatest stage achievements, but however that may be, the innovations made in the thirty productions there over a period of three years were marked contributions to the American stage, and definitely established him as a director and designer of unusual talent.

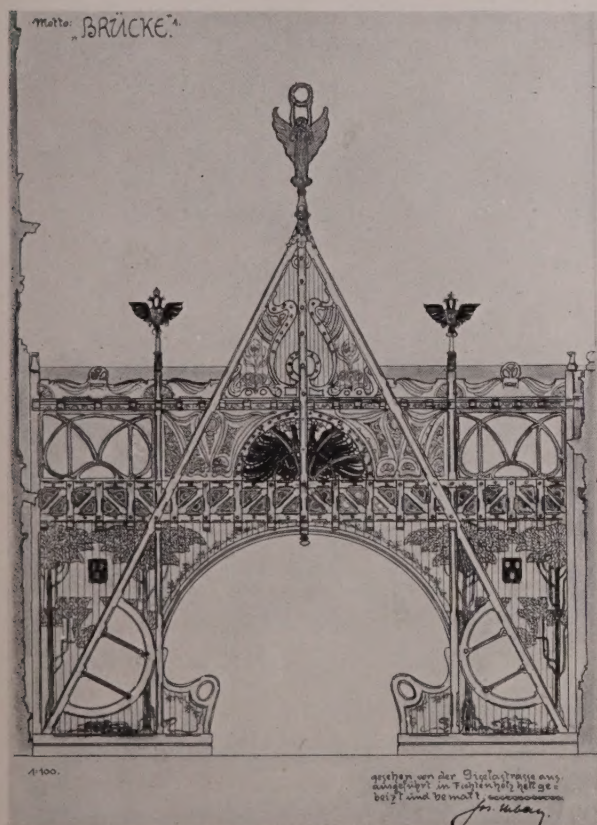


While directing the work at the Boston Opera he was called upon to design sets for Covent Garden, London, and the Opera in Paris. His direction of Wagner's "Tristan" in Paris, early in July, 1914, marked the first German opera to be presented there in thirty years. The acclaim was tremendous. People stood on their seats applauding. However, a week later the war broke out, and he went to Florence where he remained until George Tyler, who wanted him to produce "The Garden of Paradise" in New York, enabled him, with the aid of the Black Hand, to get back to New York.

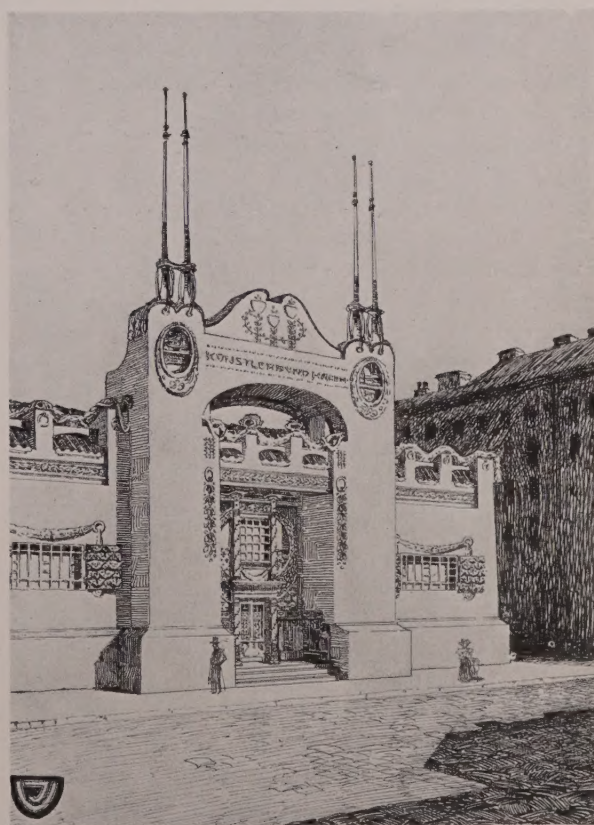
"The Garden of Paradise" was a spectacular production and the critics were lavish in

their praise. Financially the show was a failure, but it was sufficient to show what he could do and to make at least one producer realize his genius. Thus in 1914 Florenz Ziegfeld and Joseph Urban met and combined their talents to make the "Ziegfeld Follies" a byword throughout the country. The "Follies" became a symbol for theatrical novelty, beauty, refinement and extravaganza, and through them was remade to a large extent the decoration of the American stage.

Convinced that he wanted to remain in this country, where the future held more prospects of growth than in Europe, he in 1917 became a naturalized citizen, and in 1919 married Mary Porter Beegle. In a large studio near his home in Yonkers, he continued to design and execute sets for many New York productions, and from 1918 until his death designed and directed practically all the stage productions for the Metropolitan Opera. When in 1920 William Randolph Hearst organized the Cosmopolitan Productions, he became its art director and for four years took full charge of all productions. Although, as in everything he did, this work received his greatest care, he longed to return to



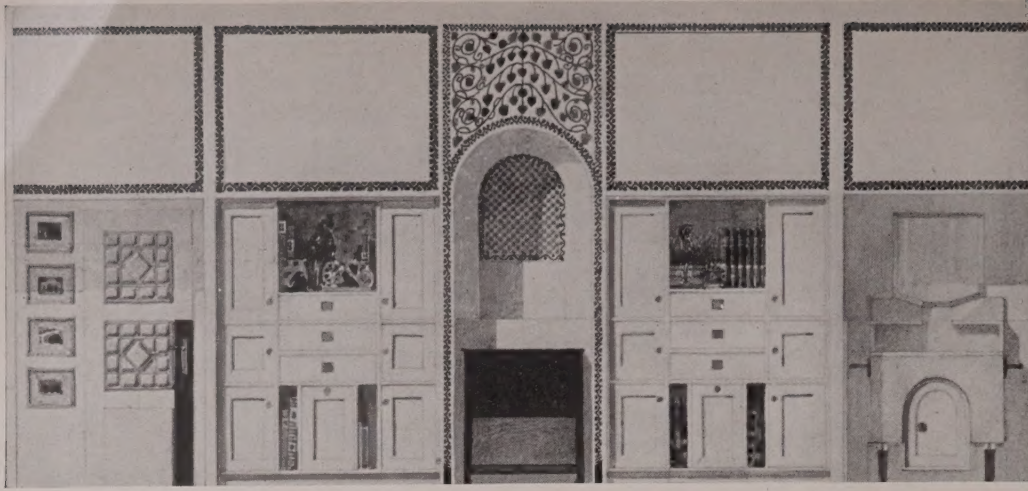
Mr. Urban's winning design for a bridge to connect the Music Verein Building with the Concert Hall in Vienna (1898)



Mr. Urban's drawing for the exterior of the Hagenbund Exhibit Building in Vienna (1900), altering the old Market Hall

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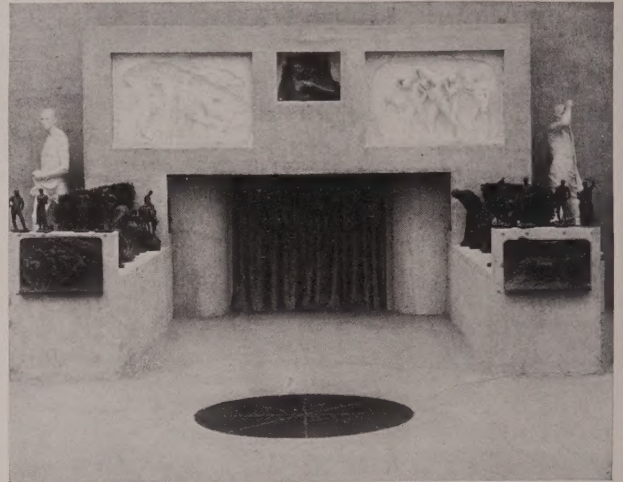
One of Mr. Urban's studies for an interior. It is difficult to realize how advanced this was when it was made in 1903

A detail in the Meunier Exhibition by the Hagenbund in Vienna (1906)

architecture. It was the financial reimbursement from the movies that enabled him to become better established and prepare the way for his return to the profession.

By 1920, having earned some financial security from his scenic work, his generous nature led him to organize a New York branch of the Wiener Werkstatte, as an aid to Viennese artists impoverished by the war. This group, under the leadership of Joseph Hoffmann, and composed of Urban's old friends and acquaintances, had been formed with the idea of marketing their craft work through a central channel. Unfortunately the war and all its prejudices were still too near, and the public taste in modern design was still too undeveloped to appreciate either purpose or merit. Although the displays in the Fifth Avenue showroom were unique, and the exhibits organized in several large cities throughout the country brought great praise, the entire venture was a financial failure. Since he had bought these objects outright to hasten aid to Vienna, and defrayed all the costs of the exhibits, the loss fell on him.

Actually this setback was a boon, for it led to his return to architecture. To recoup his losses he once more turned to the movies, this time in Hollywood. These later sets, much more architectural than before, attracted the attention of many potential home builders, one of whom, a wealthy Texan, commissioned him to design a home for the Texas plains, every detail of which, down to the carpets, was to be of special design. Although never built, this commission brought him back to the work he had always longed to do, and with the Florida boom in 1925 his return was assured. The Hutton, Biddle, Demarest and Replogle residences, the Paramount Theatre, the Oasis Club and the Bath



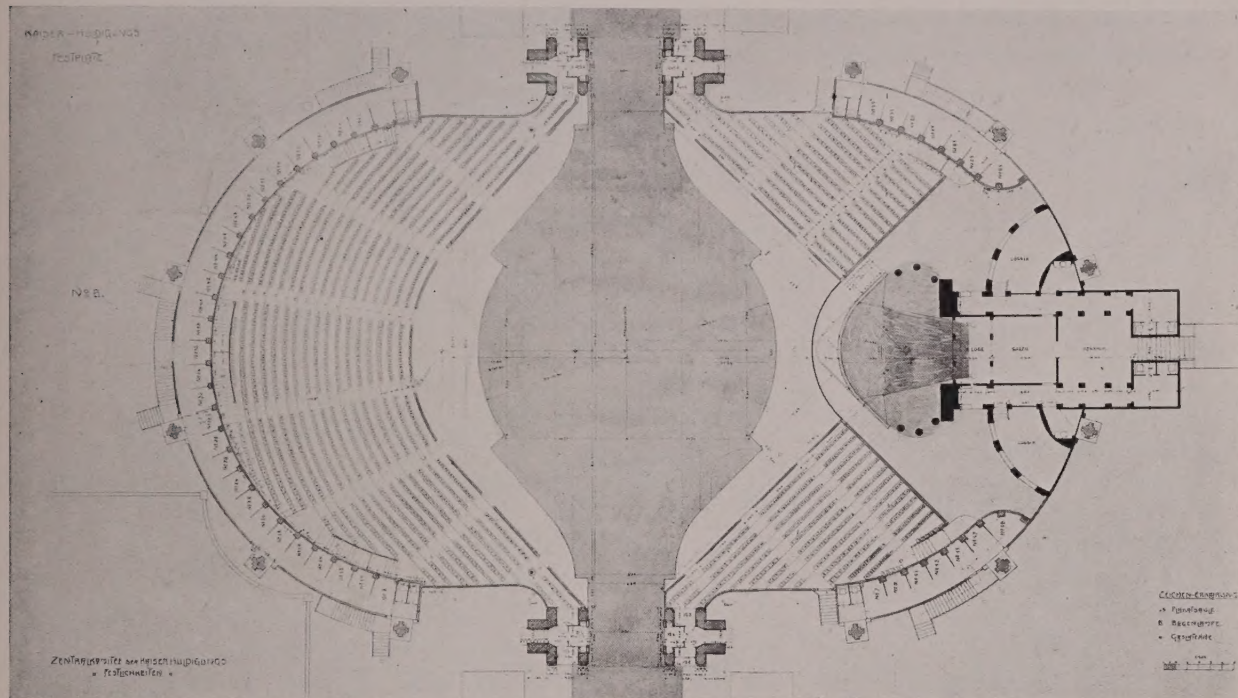
and Tennis Club of Palm Beach followed in rapid succession.

When in 1926 Ziegfeld decided to build a theatre to house the "Follies," Urban was called to do it. In this and a great many theatre projects developed during the next few years, and published in his book "Theatres" in 1929, he introduced countless innovations, and opened an entirely new approach to theatre design and construction. Of these projects the largest and most impressive was the design for the proposed Metropolitan Opera House, but the Max Reinhardt and Jewish Art theatres are novel in plan and elevation. The Music Centre was a dream by which New York would have benefited in more ways than one, but unfortunately it was never built.

The Hearst International Magazine Building, originally intended to be twenty stories high, was built in 1928 in its present abbreviated form. The New School for Social Research became a reality in 1930. Here was a school whose purpose was quite different from any other in the

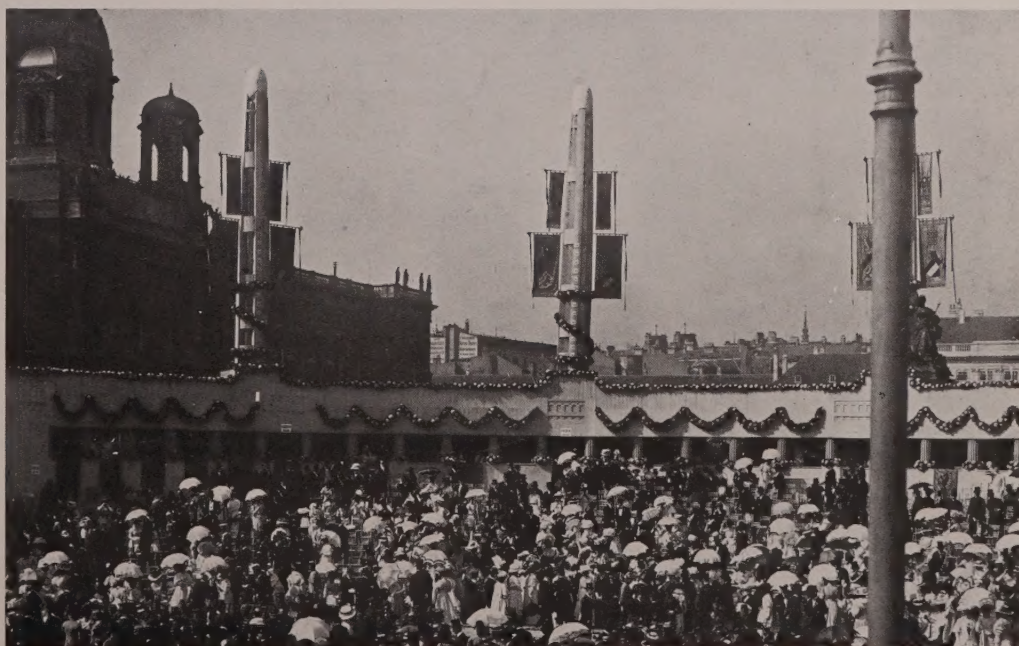
city, and its far-seeing director was particularly anxious to have a design both distinct and unusual. On the other hand, the requirements were demanding, inasmuch as the classrooms and auditoriums were numerous and particularly related to each other, while actual building space was small. For the final designs of the interiors Urban introduced an entirely new approach in the use of strong color, which was later developed on a larger scale at the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress Exposition.

Projects of a more decorative nature were the many supper rooms and restaurants that were built between 1928 and the time of his death. Among these are the St. Regis Roof, the Sea-glades of the St. Regis Hotel, the Central Park Casino, the Park Avenue and Paradise Restaurants, all in New York City; the Urban Room and the Chatterbox of the William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh; the roof of the Hotel Gibson in Cincinnati; the Mayfair Room of the Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit; the Urban Room of



Mr. Urban's plan for the Kaiser Franz Joseph Jubilee, held in Vienna in 1908, providing for the seating of the vast number of people about a central space for the pageantry

A photograph of the Jubilee for Kaiser Franz Joseph, the plan of which is shown above





A detail of the Hagenbund Exhibition of 1908

the Congress Hotel in Chicago; and the Urban Room of the Bossert Hotel in Brooklyn. The mural treatments, which constitute an important part of these decorations, were always designed by him and executed under his direction in his studios. The furnishings, such as carpets, chairs, etc., were invariably of special design made to harmonize with the particular interior. This attention to detail prevailed in the many apartments he designed in New York and other cities and is a contributing factor to their effectiveness and distinction.

The thoroughness with which he studied the detail, his able use of materials, forms and color, and the delicacy with which they were handled, are well exemplified in the exhibit of "A Ladies' Boudoir" for the American Designers' Gallery in 1928, and in the two exhibits for the Metropolitan Museum Exhibit of 1929. For pure fancy the Gingerbread House built for the Wheatsthworth Biscuit Co. at Hamburg, N. J., is a *tour de force*. It was built at the request of the company's president, who had been carried away by one of Urban's "Hansl and Gretel" sets at the Metropolitan Opera, and wished to make an appeal to children to advertise his product. On the other hand, the design for the Soviet Palace in 1931, in an international competition to which he had been invited by the Soviet Government, and by it later awarded an honorable mention, shows his grasp of a problem the requirements of which as set down in the competition program were fantastically complicated.

The last year of his life was one of his busiest, and in some ways crowned a life devoted to architecture and decoration. In 1932 he was appointed director of color and decorative effects, and consultant on the lighting, for the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition, and in this capacity was responsible for all the color on the

exterior of the buildings and their effect under artificial illumination at night. The brilliant palette, as well as the novel way these colors were used mark a turning point in the use of color in this country, and was the outstanding esthetic contribution of the Fair. This work consumed much of his time and energy, and



Photograph by Peter Juley

Entrance room of the New York shop, Wiener Werkstatte of America (1921), established in aid of Viennese artists impoverished by the war

during a winter of ill health did much to weaken his condition. A task even more dear to his heart was the design and arrangement of the New York Architectural League Exhibition in February, of which he had complete charge. This exhibit, combining a presentation of architecture, painting, craftwork, and theatre design, was so outstanding that he was awarded not only the Architectural League Gold Medal for Crafts in recognition of his model setting for a religious pageant, but the President's Medal as well.

Combined with his other duties, this work taxed his reserve strength to the limit, and he never recovered from the illness brought on when it was completed. An operation failed, and on July 10, 1933, he died. Thus passed one whose life was far more replete than most, and whose work will forever be a record of great achievement.

Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color

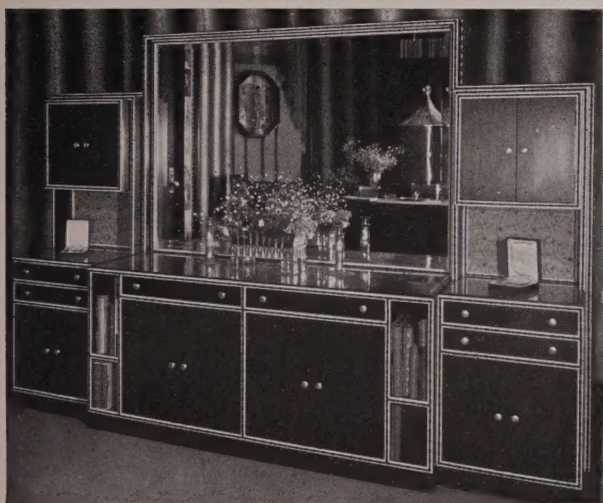
By Otto Teegen

THE characteristics that make Joseph Urban's work so individual are many, but one stands out in particular and is perhaps his greatest contribution to architecture, decoration, and stage production—that is, color. Unfortunately this article cannot dwell on the color of his speech and his actions—for he looked at everything, including life, in terms of color—but must be limited to the color as seen in his work, in particular his architectural work and decorative design.

Color was, of course, one of the principal interests of the early groups of Viennese artists of which he was a member and leader, but he seems to have been instilled with a distinct love for it from his earliest youth. He himself has written that when at the age of nineteen he visited Egypt: "My arrival in the Harbor of Alexandria was really my first impression of color. The strange deep blue of the Mediterranean, the

Secession and Hagenbund groups increased his interest in color, and the many exhibits he arranged for them developed his knowledge of it, so that when, about 1904, he entered the field of theatre production he was already prepared to make exceptional contributions to that art. He took full advantage of the opportunity there to play with color in all its forms and devoted particular care in studying the many possibilities in lighting. His experiments and accomplishments in such color and such lighting are described to a greater extent by Deems Taylor in another part of this issue, but when he finally came back to architectural practice the experience gained in the countless theatre, operatic, and movie productions during the years 1904 to 1925, was a large factor in determining the character of his architectural work and a necessary adjunct to all his decoration.

His method of using color was unique and much could be written about his choice of palettes and the theories governing their use, but to this author what seems of much more importance here is the underlying reason for using it, which was, essentially, to establish a mood. Not a halfway mood, but definite, and to accomplish that he found it often necessary to use bright colors and distinct contrasts. Above all, he was not afraid of color. What others called courage was to him merely using the knowledge so many years of experience had taught him. It was the spirit and the character he was seeking and he found that nothing helped him achieve that more than color.



A buffet in the Wiener Werkstatte show room, New York City (1921)

white city, the flaming sails of the boats, the riot of color in the costumes, and over all a purple sky—this enormous impression followed me my whole life and dominated for years my color schemes. I think the indescribable blue of the Egyptian sky created my life-long love of blue."

As early as 1896 he was making the beautiful fairy-tale illustrations which are as important in their color as they are in composition and sentiment. His close contact with the artists of the



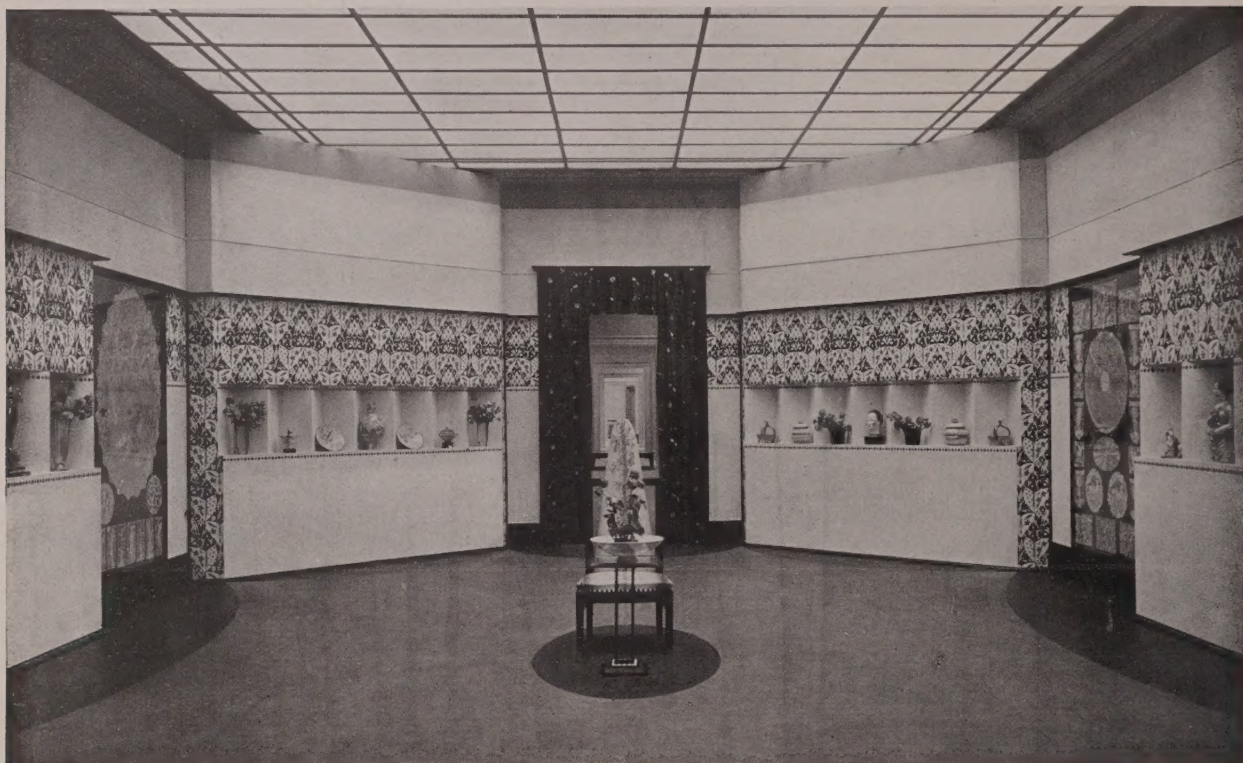
A motion-picture setting for "Young Diana" (1922)

This can best be illustrated by referring to the Ziegfeld Theatre. In his book "Theatres" (1929) he states: "Here was a place where people, coming out of crowded homes and through crowded streets, may find life carefree, bright, and leisured." To achieve this the interior scheme of decoration was made to consist of one single mural painting which covered the entire room. "The carpet and seats are in tones of gold, which colors are continued up on the walls to form the base of the mural decorations, where heroes of old romance form the detail of color

ence for floriated patterns in his mural decoration. Unfortunately the clients were still in the allegorical stage of mural appreciation, and the scheme was never fulfilled. The legend follows:

"An office building of gigantic proportions, with corridors fifty feet high and hundreds of feet long, with numerous elevators and thousands of people passing through, should not be decorated with allegorical or mythological subjects which would require time and space for study and enjoyment.

"When hurrying through the streets, of all



Photograph by Frederick O. Bemm

The exhibition of the Wiener Werkstatte crafts at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1922

interspersed with gold. The aim in the decoration of this room was to create a covering that would be a warm texture surrounding the auditorium during the performance. In the intermission this design serves to maintain an atmosphere of colorful gaiety and to furnish the diversion of following the incidents of an unobtrusive pattern. During the performance the pattern is felt rather than seen, merely an avoidance of emptiness."

Another instance of what color in decoration meant to him is shown in the description written on a rendering of a ceiling pattern for a large office-building lobby in one of our Middle Western industrial cities. It also explains his prefer-

the beautiful shop windows the most attractive is the florist's, filled with beautiful flowers. One can rush by and, without being diverted from his thoughts, can still catch a glimpse and enjoy the beauty of the color and the form of the flowers. From this point of view I developed the elements of my decorative scheme." Then follows the description of the various elements to be painted.

The mural treatments used on such jobs as the Central Park Casino and the St. Regis Roof or the Seaglades, in New York City, are typical of the flower motifs and the coloring he preferred. The mural in all cases determined the color scheme for the entire decoration of the

A corner of the garage enclosure, servants' quarters, house designed by Mr. Urban for E. F. Hutton, Palm Beach, Fla. (1926)

Photographs by F. E. Geisler



In the patio of the Hutton house, Palm Beach (1926)

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Patio of the Oasis Club, Palm Beach, Fla., which Joseph Urban designed and built in 1926

Photographs by F. E. Geisler

An exterior detail of the Bath and Tennis Club, another one of Joseph Urban's creations which reflects accurately the life of the Florida playground in 1926

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room, and the carpets, draperies, furniture, upholstery—in fact everything in the rooms to the table service—was brought into harmony. They all have color, not only by day, but by night when such colors are augmented by artificial illumination resulting often in giving the entire room a different atmosphere. In the case of the Urban Room in the Congress Hotel of Chicago, the lights are so arranged that the entire room can be bathed alternately in red, blue, yellow, or white light. Gold, blue—particularly a blue green which some now refer to as an Urban blue—and white and black were the colors more generally used, but there was never a sameness in the character of these projects, and he always established a new palette for each job and the mood desired.

In the interior treatment of the New School for Social Research, completed in 1930, he adapted a new approach. Here color was used as a positive force—in large masses on plain plaster wall surfaces. The colors are bright, but used with such good relationship that the combinations are always pleasing and give a perfect expression to the forms they are. The color is in fact the form, the volume. One does not feel that certain architectural surfaces have been painted, but that these architectural planes and volumes are actually color planes and color volumes which have been composed to make a room or a library, as the case may be.



Through his interior work Mr. Urban added a tremendous stimulation in the use of color in this country, and in so doing rendered an invaluable service. However, his desire to use color was not limited to the interior. He felt very definitely that color for exterior work was the next step, and would open up an entirely new future in architectural design. It is true that we in America have outgrown the Brown Decades, but our cities, particularly our industrial cities of the North and East, are drab, dreary, and uninteresting. How many of us, looking out of our Pullman window as we are carried past the small characterless cities along the line, have not wished that the skies might some day rain paint, millions of gallons of paint, no matter what color, just to give new life to those dreary forms. Civilized man, it seems, refuses to take a lesson from Nature, who gives us not only color but changes of color in the transformations created with the passing of the seasons. I say civilized man, because curiously



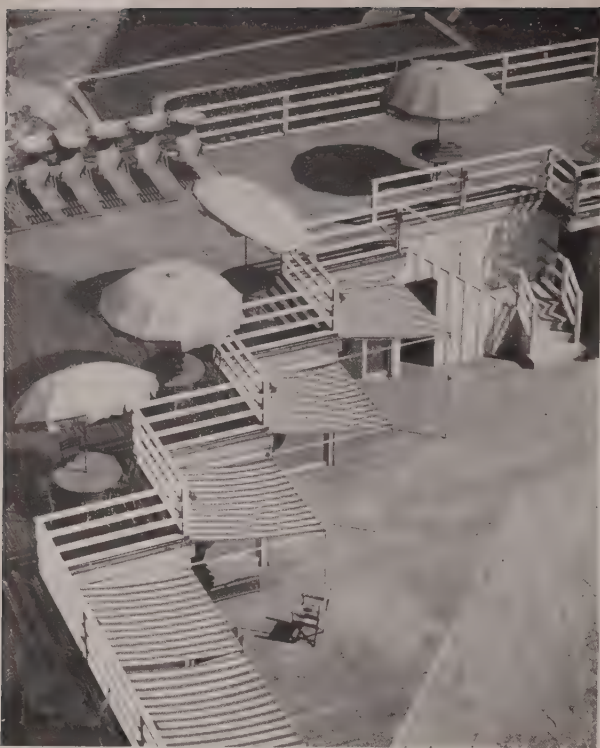
Interior of the Austrian Pavilion, St. Louis Exposition, which Joseph Urban was sent here to design (1904)

enough the aborigines of every country from Arabia to Alaska find color such an essential part of their lives.

We have only to consider our larger cities. How many millions have been spent on building materials, expensive but void of color, and that atmosphere which color can so easily give. Our architects have created huge masses, so-



Dining-room of the Bath and Tennis Club, Palm Beach, Fla. (1926)



Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln

A detail of the Atlantic Beach Club, Atlantic Beach, Long Island (1929)

called grand compositions, spent years in developing what is known as modern architecture, and yet when all is said and done, they have only given us new silhouettes and added gray walls to the existing gray entourage. They have either never known how, or else never had the courage, to think in terms of color. It would be

sad to believe they never realized its value. A few exceptional pioneers who are to be commended have taken their courage in hand and by the use of colored terra-cotta, brick, metal, even window shades, given a new note to their work, but they are few. Nor have they always been successful, but even where color has been badly used it has been a bright note in the midst of sadness, and more satisfactory than dull or colorless surroundings.

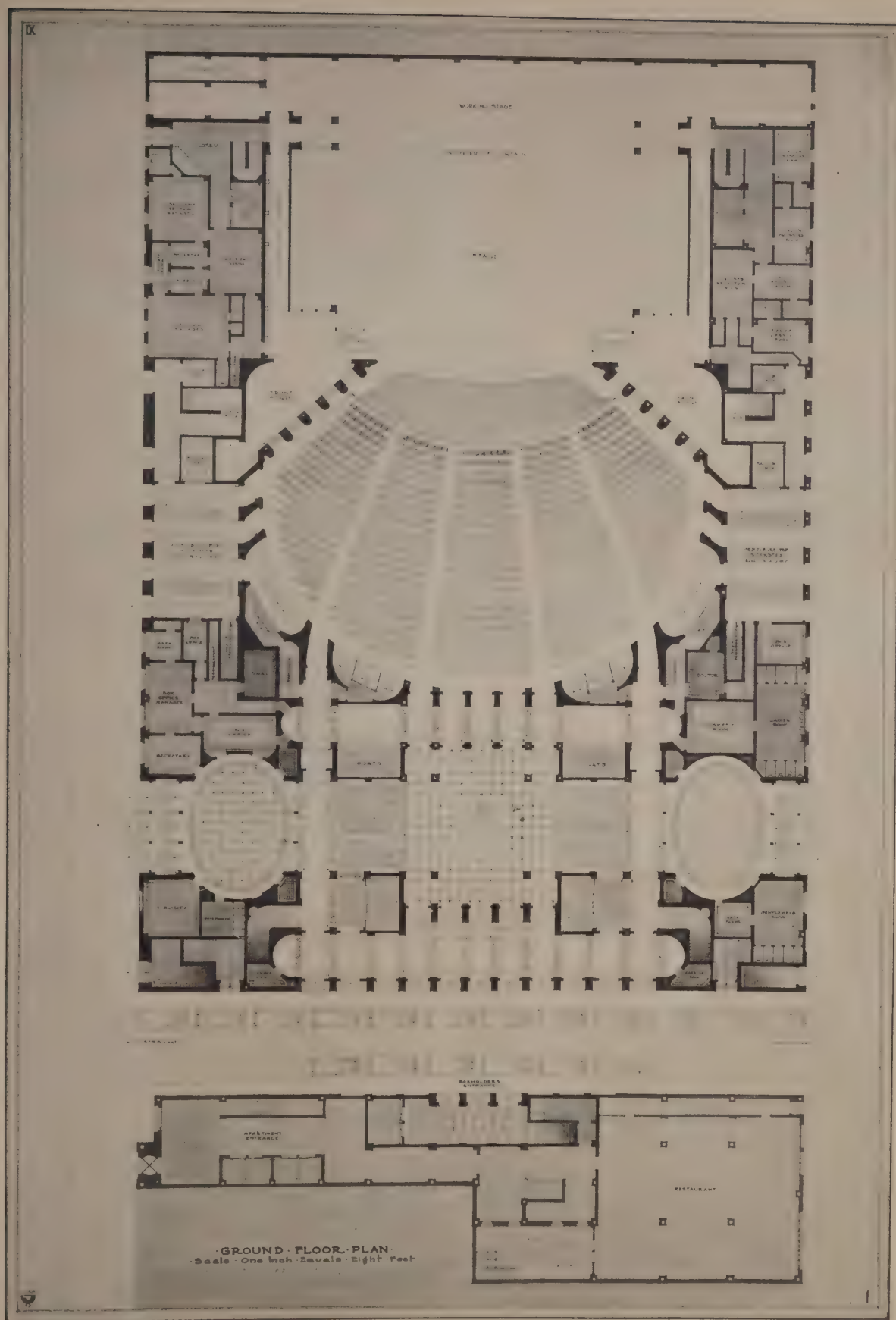


The possibilities of obtaining rich and new effects with color, used either integrally or applied, are unlimited. Color can give life and interest, depth or light to the plain surfaces of individual buildings. Instead of going to untold expense and trouble to create a three- or four-inch reveal with the hope that a shadow will carry through some vertical or horizontal line when the sun shines, perhaps our architects will some day realize that with integrally colored materials one can realize the same effect without the reveals, and be sure it will be there on a dull as well as a sunny day. They will also perhaps realize that the expense involved is materially less, and that there are more ways than those now adopted to achieve economy in building.

In 1927 Urban wrote: "When the morning sun gilds the city and casts blue shadows, even the buildings of neutral coloring are often very beautiful, but there are many hours when these



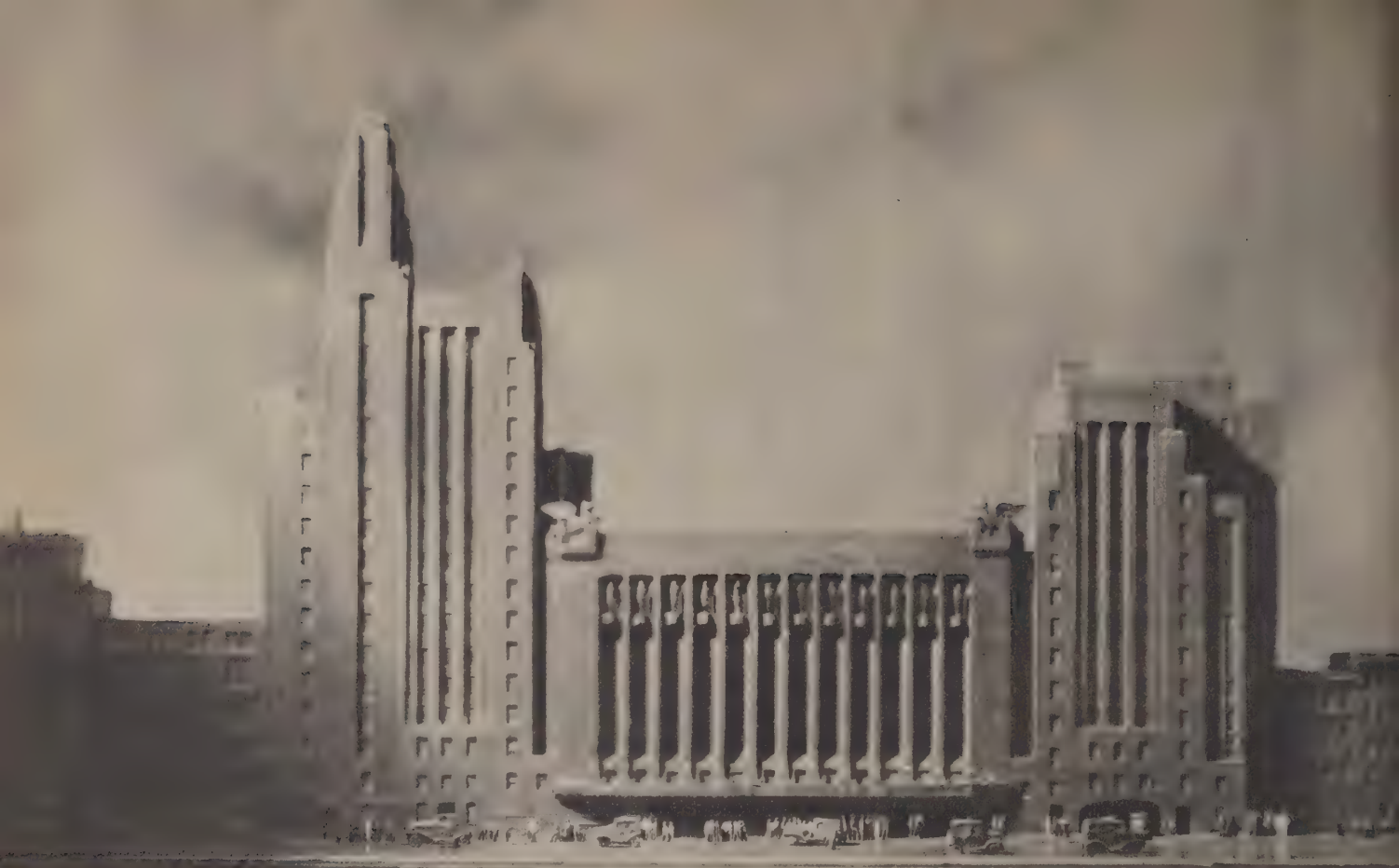
A preliminary drawing for the Paramount Theatre, Palm Beach, Fla. (1926)



Ground-floor plan, Scheme IX, of the proposed Metropolitan Opera House for the 57th Street site, New York City (1927)

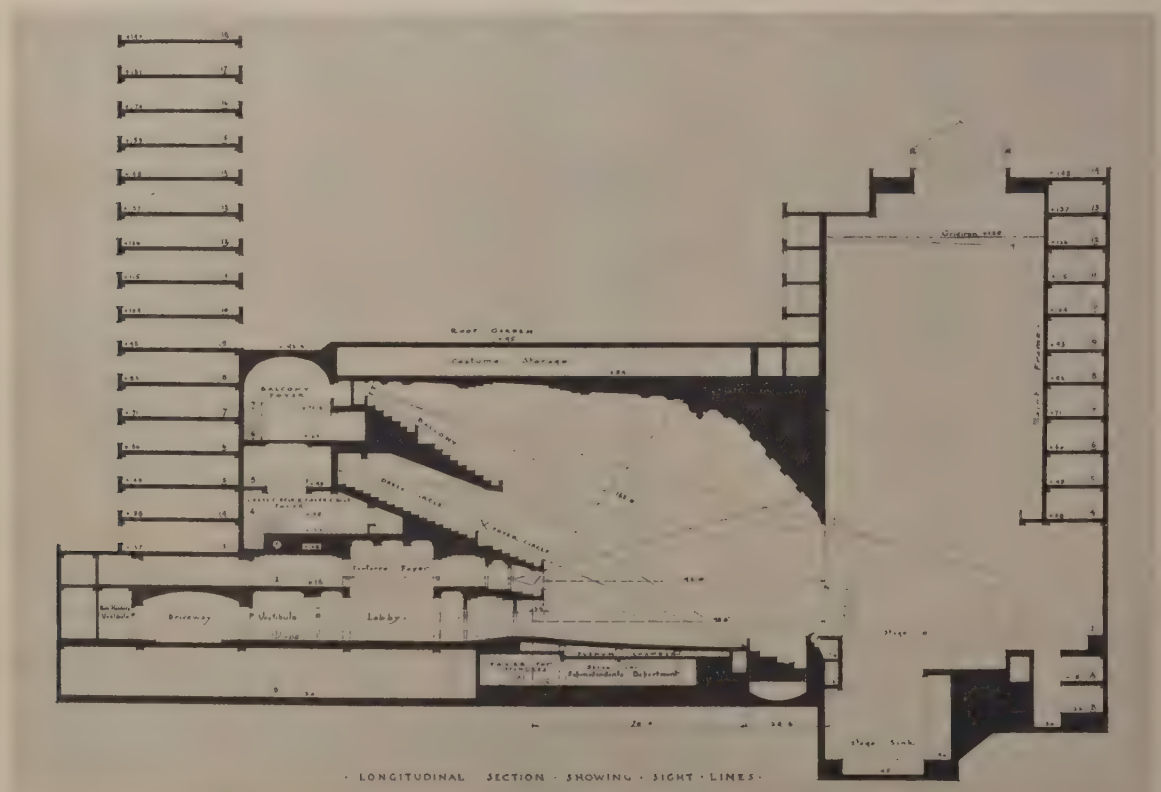
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Photograph from a study model of the proposed Metropolitan Opera House, 57th Street site, New York City (1927)

A section through the proposed Metropolitan Opera House, indicating the sight lines



effects are not seen and there are gray days. Then our buildings need positive colors to enliven them. When we look at the city at night, we see light in many tones. Some are dazzling white, others are soft and warm. A building can have the same distinctiveness in the daytime. Its color can express its personality. These colorful structures will have charm on gloomy days as well as when the sunlight tints them, and at night all degrees of the lights and shadows of artificial illumination will have their part in modifying and enhancing them."



His own contribution to show what color can do amid dull surroundings is in the façade of the New School for Social Research, where, although only black and white are used, the contrast and relation of light to dark is distinctly striking and happy. The Atlantic Beach Club, whose function allows a bit gayer treatment, is composed of red, yellow, blue, and white stuccoed surfaces, while the brilliantly colored awnings, beach umbrellas, and piers complete the picture. In his original conception the exterior color on the Ziegfeld Theatre was to become prominent only at night, and with



Hugh Ferriss's drawing of Joseph Urban's design for the Ziegfeld Theatre, New York City (1927)

the darkness the façade was to be flooded from the colored lenses in floods placed behind the parapets. It is significant to mention in this regard, that whenever he thought in terms of



Proposed Reinhardt Theatre, New York City, in which Mr. Urban glorified the fire-escape and the electric sign (1927)



A detail of the lobby ceiling in the International Magazine Building, New York City, designed by Mr. Urban in 1927

colored illumination he incorporated the housing for the necessary lighting equipment with his design and thus eliminated the possibility of exposed floods and glaring lights which at best look like afterthoughts.

It is unfortunate he did not have time to carry his ideas on city buildings further, but it is significant that his last work, the coloring of the Chicago World's Fair, displayed, in a way that had never been dreamed of before, the vast possibilities of using color on exterior design. It is true that not only the colors but the mode of handling was somewhat special because of the character of the problem, but it was a daring innovation and marked the beginning of a new era in which color in architecture is certain to be much more significant than in the past. It also opened a completely new field in the science of illumination, inasmuch as the problem of lighting such brightly colored buildings was entirely new to the engineer and had to be solved in its own special way. How successful certain lighting was is a story in itself, so it



Preliminary perspective, The New School for Social Research, New York City (1930)



A detail in the supper room, Congress Hotel, Chicago (1932)

must suffice to say that some of the effects achieved by gaseous tube lighting and floods with colored lenses playing on the painted surfaces of the buildings were revelations and brought out a richness and depth of color never before attained.

The problem of coloring the World's Fair was manifold, inasmuch as a palette and color scheme had to be worked out at a time when but four buildings existed, two of them three miles apart, and the plans for the location of the other buildings, with very few exceptions, were entirely undeveloped, thus necessitating laying the scheme out on a more or less hypothetical arrangement of buildings and masses. The real achievement was in determining the palette, and in choosing that it is safe to say he used colors of a brighter intensity than had ever been used on work of similar scale. How he used those colors, and composed them into the color schemes for the various buildings, how he used this color in a positive force, that is, as integral part of planes and volumes, rather than as an adjunct-like decoration applied to a surface, cannot be explained here, but the essential fact is that by their use and their skillful handling he was able to tie three miles of heterogeneous architectural forms, without planned relation to each other, into one display and give a unity to



Photograph by Sigurd Fischer

Corner of the Ziegfeld Theatre, New York City (1927)



A detail in the St. Regis roof garden, New York City (1927)

Grill room in the Hotel Bossert, Brooklyn (1928)





Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln

Ginger Bread House for Wheatsworth Biscuits, Hamburg, N. Y. (1928)

Sun porch which Mr. Urban was invited to design for the Metropolitan Museum Exhibit of 1929



Photograph by Wurts Brothers

Entrance to the former Bedell Shop, New York City (1928)

A man's study—another part of the Metropolitan's Exhibit of 1929





Photograph by Sigurd Fischer

*A detail of the Tulip Room, Central Park Casino,
New York City (1929)*



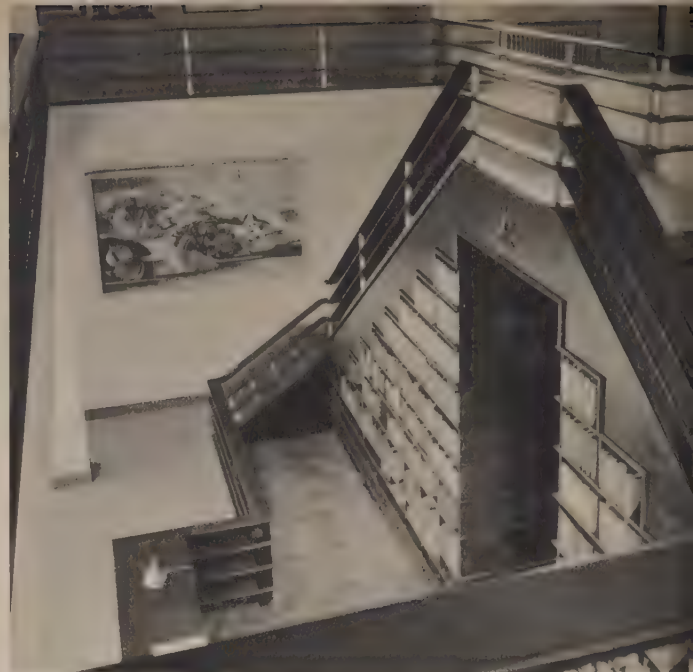
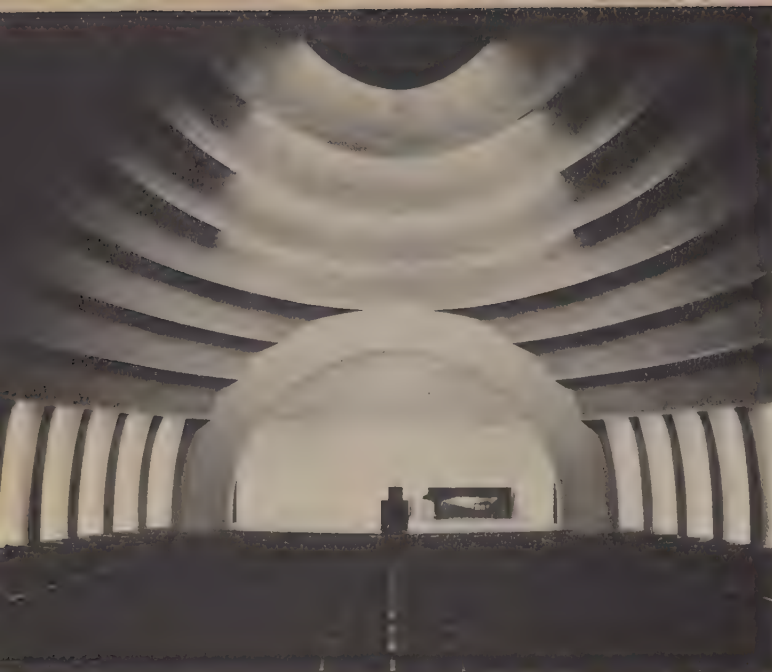
Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln

*A corner of Mr. Urban's office reception room,
New York City (1930)*

The Atlantic Beach Club, incorporating its cabanas, Atlantic Beach, Long Island (1929)



Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln



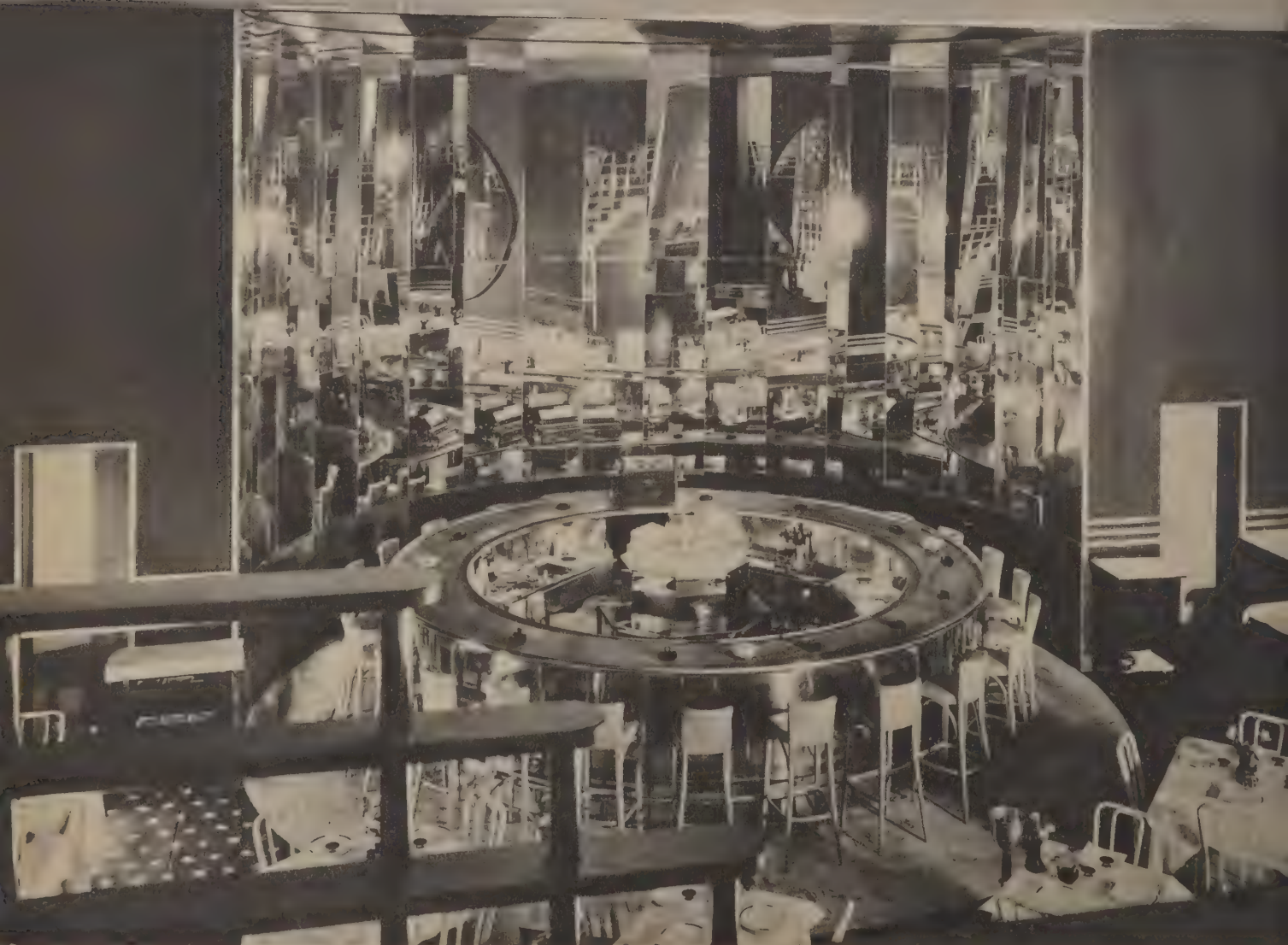
Photographs by Nyholm & Lincoln

Auditorium, New School for Social Research, New York City (1930)

The library in the New School for Social Research (1930)

The Park Avenue Restaurant, New York City (1931)

Photograph by Nyholm



the entire Fair which otherwise would have fallen to pieces.

However, these were practical considerations. The real and to him most important reason for using such color was to give the exposition a spirit of carnival, of gaiety and happiness. He intended that the atmosphere of daily life should be lost the moment one entered the Fair grounds, that the visitors should forget their cares and troubles and be conscious only of the joy of living. Here was his opportunity to share with not a few but millions of people his own attitude toward life. Few artists have had the opportunity of pleasing so many people with one display, and he revelled in the possibilities.


That this color scheme was no hit-or-miss proposition, but had been thought out in its entirety, is best illustrated by a visit the writer made to New York just a month before the Fair was opened, and when it was apparent that Mr. Urban would not be well enough to come to Chicago. His last view of the grounds had been in the previous September, when no more than five of the buildings were erected, painting had not been started, and the landscape was a barren waste. At this memorable conference we went over all the details of the color and lighting of the buildings, now numbering close to a hundred—the elevations, plans, and locations of

which he had been able to study only on blue prints. Yet there was not a single detail in that entire discussion, lasting two days, which he did not visualize immediately and exactly. He knew the colors and their location on each building, and gave full instructions as to how he wished them to be lighted so as to obtain the best effect at night. He had a picture in his mind which with all our efforts and tolerable success we failed to equal.

In embarking on this radical color scheme he expected it to shock—perhaps offend—but he had learned from past experience that with every advance there is opposition. He deliberately set out to make people consider—if possible to feel—the stimulating quality of color. That some were made to realize this for the first time in their lives, and that some were at first sight actually frightened there is no doubt, but to every one who objected a hundred acclaimed, and, it is to be hoped, returned to their own colorless homes with new courage to do something about making them brighter and happier. And so, in the last analysis, Urban's last work fulfilled what he had made his life's purpose—to bring happiness through the creation of beauty. He set a great example which cannot fail to give courage to those who will continue to build on work so ably begun.

Joseph Urban, the Man

By Ralph Walker

 IED up in my earliest remembrance as a boy is a fascination for the theatre. As I grew up, this love of mine was very catholic for I took in my stride up the steep stairs to the nigger heaven of a dog town, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Comic Opera, Gilbert and Sullivan (on whose melodic nonsense I had been rocked to sleep); "Madame Butterfly" in English, my first opera; David Warfield, Nazimova, Sothorn and Marlowe, Schumann-Heink; the "Follies" with Bert Williams, "Ten Nights in a Bar Room," "Uncle Tom's Cabin"—all these were exciting adventures.

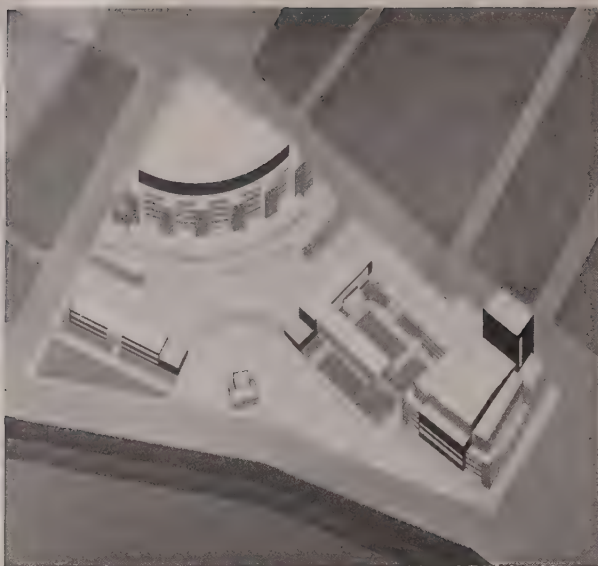
Belasco was my great hero. I made a special trip to New York to see "The Darling of the Gods." It seemed almost miraculous that such pains could be taken in the working up of detail.

Meanwhile I had gone to Boston and, as part of that experience, was reading each night H. T. P. in *The Transcript*. I read of Joseph

Urban. I saw pictures of his designs. I knew he had a studio at Swampscott. And then I saw "Pelléas et Mélisande," for which Urban designed the stage.

"Pelléas" was a new and a thrilling experience. The music was lost in the beauty of the stage. Here was a world of magic. Here was something which made Belasco look trivial with all his minutiae. Here was a modern note, although the word modern was not heard in the land in those far-off days. I do not remember the music from that hearing, but I shall never forget the beauty of Urban's stage, and yet the beauty of both are so interwoven in my mind that "Pelléas" means Debussy and Urban. But more than that, the stage of my experience could never again be anything but tested against the simple and breath-taking beauty of those few hours.

Years later I was asked to form a symposium on the question of a new architecture and



Aerial perspective of Mr. Urban's design for the Soviet Palace International Competition (1931)

for some reason I called up Joseph Urban, whom I did not know personally, to help. Perhaps I felt that here was an individuality, a man who created beauty, and who was not bound by any limitations except his own.

From that time there grew on my part a strong affection and admiration for a man I found to be wholesome, hearty, generous, and whose ability to create was rare indeed. I think



Living-room, Katharine Brush apartment, New York City (1932)

he astonished all the architects who knew him well in his great capacity for work. Every variety of problem needing design came from his own hands a beautifully finished result, complete in feeling and detail.

It is very difficult to be dispassionate concerning the work of a friend. His work can, of course, be judged coldly and with logic, taken apart and dissected for its faults and merits, but to me the warm generous spirit of the man, the fine unselfishness inherent within him, continues to make it difficult to separate the work from the man himself.

He was what the intellectual calls a romanticist; in other words, he had a greater love for humanity than for mere ideas, a love for color and detail and the joy of living. His work made people happy and, in that, his architecture could not help but be affected by his long experience in designing for the stage.

To me the most amazing quality about him was his youth—although he was past sixty. Amazing, too, were his versatility and his lack of fear in tackling a design with new thought and with the use of new materials. But he brought to each design, however modern, an understanding of human needs and aspirations, so that the results were never cold and mechanical.

In his book on theatres a paragraph interests me, as it well expresses his views on art and life, and I think it also expresses to a larger extent the meaning of his architectural work. "A theatre is more than a stage and auditorium. It is a place in which to experience a heightened sense of life. Two factors interact to establish this vivid sensation—the place and the performance. The drama is an illusion of real life. It is more moving than life. The drama may be gayer than real life, more exalted than real life or fuller than real life, but it dare not remain a merely factual presentation, lest it perish as drama and good theatre. Good theatre is an art. The function of art is to translate nature and life into terms of human expression. Art is an aid to man in the effort to establish a relation between his life and his environment."

Although trained as an architect in Vienna and early accomplished in his practice, for long years he gave of his effort to the stage, so that when he again took up the practice of architecture it was unfortunately too late in life because it ended before he accomplished as much as was in him. It was unfortunate, for he fitted superbly into what the new world is trying to attain artistically and economically.



Photograph by F. S. Lincoln

Studio in the apartment for Katharine Brush, New York City (1932)



Mr. Urban's original water-color study for the Avenue of Flags, Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago (1933)

*Exhibition of The Architectural League of New York (1933), for which Joseph Urban received the President's Medal
 Photograph by Samuel H. Gottscho*





Design for "Furber," Act II, made for the Metropolitan Opera Company (1919). This is from the drawing, the top of which is emerald green.

The Scenic Art of Joseph Urban

HIS PROTEAN WORK IN THE THEATRE

By Deems Taylor

THE Mediterranean is not seen, nor any detail of villa or of foliage, of bridge or of shore. Only the sky is visible, and it is a sky without cloud or star. But the morning, the spring of the air has reassured the reassurance of the modern theatre. It is a deep and magic blue, solitary in its own, yet welcoming limbo-like regions of heaven. It is a world, if you wish, of the Mediterranean; the very breath and spirit of the Côte d'Azur. And it illuminates the continuous stream with a sense of imaginative unity only less persuasive, compelling, than that of music.

John Charles wrote that in 1914, in *The New York Times*, concerning a set by Joseph Urban. A grand many fine words, one might think, so lavished on a plain natural scene. But they were demanded, for that natural landscape was at once a result and a symbol of one of Joseph Urban's more important contributions to the American theatre. We shall hear more of that landscape later.

The year 1914 was the one in which Urban

was being discovered by New York—and, scarcely enough, as an architect and scenic artist who had been famous in Europe for more than a decade; not even as the designer of more than fifty productions for an American opera company, but as the creator of the new Ziegfeld "Follies." Boston had known and acclaimed him for four years, but Boston does not rank as a producing centre—at least, not in the eyes of New York critics and producers. Urban's reputation had remained a local one. New York had once one production of his, but the play had been a failure, and so had been forgotten. Had it not been for the war, which interrupted him here, and the interest of Florenz Ziegfeld, which carried him into the arena of modern show business, it is quite possible that Joseph Urban's name in America today would rank with that, not, of John Baskin—a legend, rather than a real influence.

Urban's original entrance into the field of stage design was unpremeditated, almost accidental. During the decade that ended in 1904

he was known in Germany and Austria as a rising young architect and a brilliant illustrator. In 1900 his book decorations for "The Chronicle of the Three Sisters," done in collaboration with Heinrich Leffler, had won him the grand gold medal of Austria. The following year his government sent him to America, as an architect, to design the Austrian pavilions for the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. But meanwhile he had been lured into the theatre. Some decorative drawings of his for a new edition of Goethe's "Faust" had attracted the attention of the director of the Vienna Royal Theatre, who sent for the young artist. Would he consider doing scenery for a production of Parts I and II of the drama "Faust"? He would, and did, in 1900; and thus began a career that occupied much of his working time until his death.



His progress in the new field was rapid. By 1911 he had designed stage settings for the Vienna Hofburgtheater and Hofoper Theater, the Komische Oper in Berlin, and theatres and opera houses in Mannheim, Cologne, Hamburg, Budapest, and half a dozen other German and Austrian cities—a total of something between forty and fifty separate productions.

Early in 1911 he was in Paris, to consult with Claude Debussy about a new German production of "Pelléas et Mélisande." It was at Debussy's house that he met Henry Russell, who was planning to produce "Pelléas" with his newly formed Boston Opera Company. Rus-

sell, after seeing some of Urban's designs, promptly commissioned three productions from him, and engaged him as general scenic director of the Boston Opera House.

Urban arrived in the fall, bringing with him his own staff of scene painters from Vienna, and set up his studio in Boston. To the credit of the Boston critics be it said that from the very beginning many of them realized that the Viennese newcomer was introducing a revolutionary change in the art of scene painting.



Revolutionary in this country, that is. Who invented this method of painting I don't know. Urban never claimed to have done so. Romola Nijinsky, in her recent biography of her famous dancer husband, gives the credit to Boris Anisfeld, who, she says, introduced it in the scenery that he painted for the Russian Ballet in 1910. But in 1910 Urban had been painting by the new method for several years; so it couldn't have been Anisfeld's invention. Regardless of who the actual originator was, Joseph Urban was certainly the man who introduced it into this country; and the entire modern American school of scene design has since followed his example.

The new method, the new approach, so unheard of then, and such a matter of course now, was simply this: To paint scenery, not in imitation of nature, but as a medium for the reception of colored light. To revert to the Urban back-drop of which Corbin wrote: in former days, when you wanted to represent a sky in



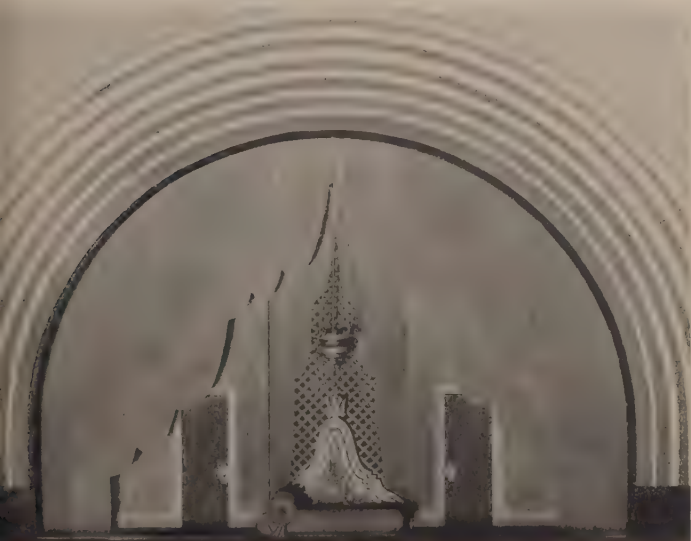
The fairy scene from "Falstaff," Act III, Scene 2, from Joseph Urban's drawing for the Metropolitan production (1924)



Photograph by F. S. Lincoln

Joseph Urban's last design for the Metropolitan Opera Company (1931): The setting for Strauss's "Elektra." The ominous mood of the massive structure is enhanced by the coloring, which suggests red sandstone. This is a photograph from the scene model

Scene model for "The Princess Charming" (1919)



Harem scene (model) from the "Follies of 1921"



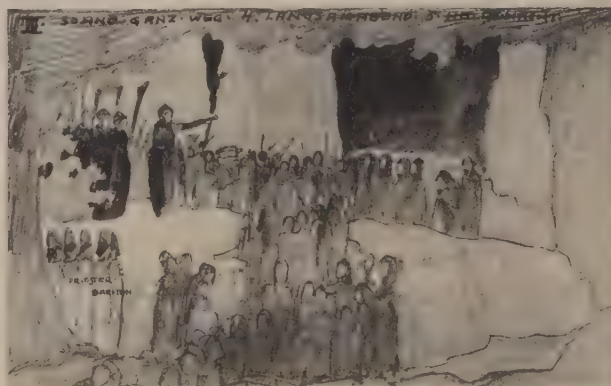


The Walpurgis Night scene from "Faust" (Boston, 1912). Photograph from the actual set. Below are four studies for the progressive grouping and lighting of the scene



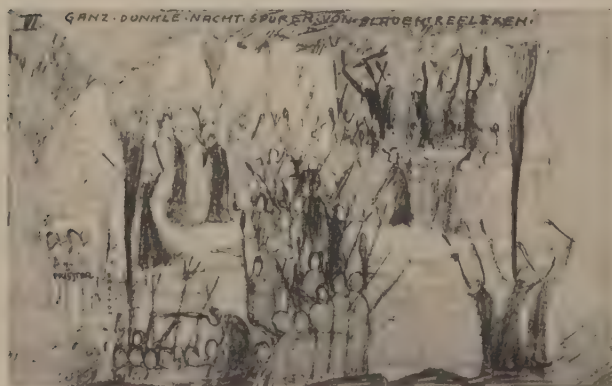
Es lacht der Mai — blue sky and gray rocks

Deep night — gray and red costumes, green flames



Sunset — yellow sky, red and gray costumes

Dawn — pale yellow sky, blue-violet shadows



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the theatre, you covered a canvas drop with blue paint, touched in a few clouds, hung the result against the back wall of the building, and threw white light upon it. What you then saw was a pretty bad *painting* of a sky with clouds. Urban's method was to lay the drop on the floor, and, using a semi-dry brush, spatter it with three or four shades of blue, with additional, sparser spatterings of red, green, and silver. The result, under daylight or white artificial light, was neutral gray. But throw strong blue light upon it, and you got an intense, transparent atmospheric blue, with no suggestion either of paint or canvas. Throw pink light upon it, and your sky turned pink; under amber light it turned yellow. In other words, given the proper lighting, you could produce anything from dawn to sunset and moonlight on the same piece of canvas, with a softness and luminosity of color that produced on the eye of the beholder the effect of the sky itself. This method was, of course, simply an adaptation of the "pointillage" system of painting, which was based on the theory that color could best be suggested by breaking it up into its component parts. The system worked even better when applied to scene painting, inasmuch as any color could be "picked up" and made predominant by appropriate lighting.



It was a system that broke loose entirely from the traditions of easel painting, that definitely established a stage set as something to be looked at in the theatre, under theatrical lighting—and nowhere else. The very perfection with which Joseph Urban's settings fulfilled their function makes it impossible for any photograph to do them justice. The forms, the design, the grouping of masses, can be reproduced; but the vibrant, living color in which the scenes were bathed, the marvellous illusion of aerial perspective—these, the distinguishing characteristics of Urban's work, can never be conveyed in black and white.

Urban stayed with the Boston Opera Company for four years, when the company broke up for lack of funds. For the time being he was busy with a new commission from Liebler & Company to make the scenic production for Edward Sheldon's "The Garden of Paradise." But the play languished, and Liebler & Company went bankrupt. This disaster, coming after the collapse of the opera company, left him with a studio full of idle workmen, debts

amounting to ten thousand dollars, and no money. In order to keep the wolf from completely demolishing the door he went to San Francisco in 1915 and designed an exhibit for the Exposition, entitled "The History of the Shoe." This at least gave the painters something to do.



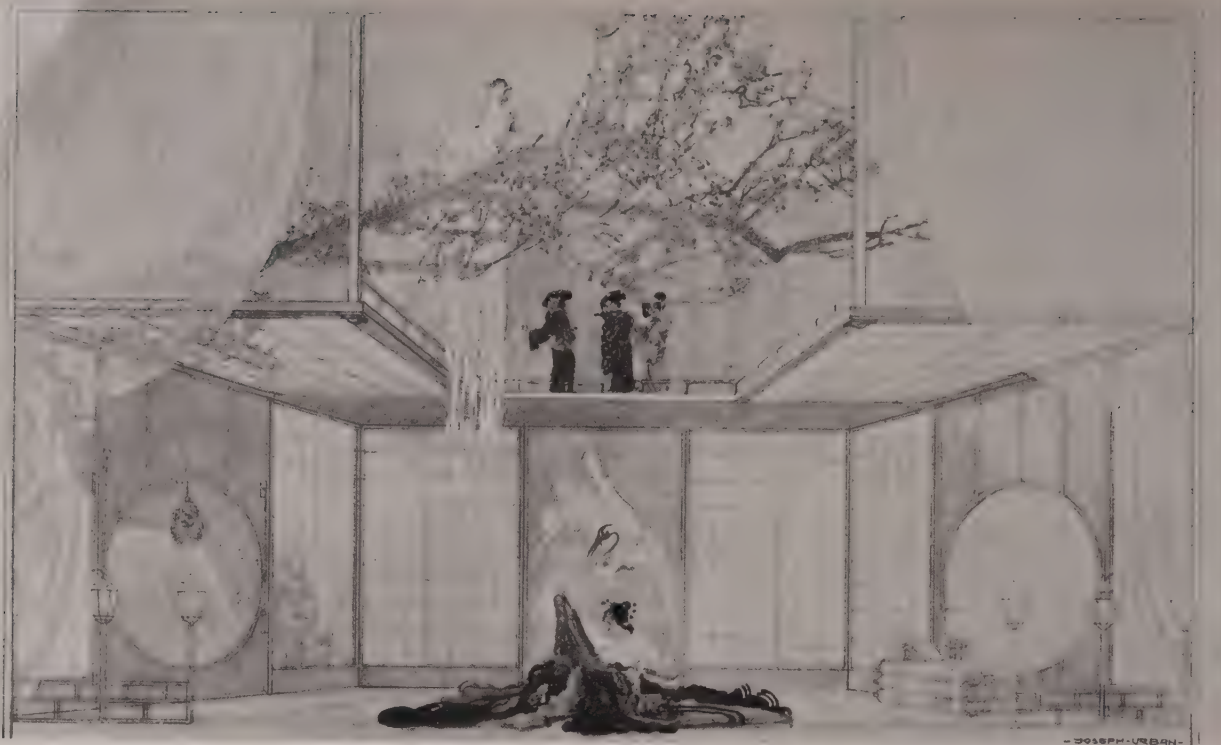
Photograph by Rialto Photo Service

The cemetery scene from "Don Giovanni" (Metropolitan, 1929), photographed from the actual set. The statue is alive. Notice the special teaser curtain

His fortunes changed almost overnight. Ever since 1906 Florenz Ziegfeld had been producing a series of annual revues, faintly topical in character, but depending largely upon the drawing power of elaborate spectacles and beautiful show girls, the combination being known as Ziegfeld's "Follies." His right-hand man and poet-musician-laureate was Gene Buck. Mr. Buck had seen "The Garden of Paradise," and, struck by the spectacular nature of Urban's talents, persuaded Ziegfeld to make him an offer. Urban was a little dubious concerning the propriety of the proposed venture; but after all, the theatre was the theatre. After a period of more or less perfunctory hesitation he consented to design the scenic production for "The Follies of 1915."



The beauty and imaginative daring of his designs made them an instantaneous success. New Yorkers had never seen anything like them. The public began to flock to the "Follies," not to watch the show, but to look at the scenery; the critics began to write treatises on "The New Art of the Theatre," using the "Follies" as a text; and the producers began to besiege him with commissions.



"The Rose of China" (drawing, 1923), illustrating the use of gauze side curtains in a double-decked set

Drawing for the setting of "Carmen," Act I (Metropolitan, 1923), a study in blue and orange



Scene model of a setting from "Don Giovanni" made for the Boston Opera Company in 1913



From then on the success of his career was assured. In 1916 he was engaged to design the auditorium and stage-setting for "Caliban of the Yellow Sands," Percy Mackaye's masque in celebration of Shakespeare's tercentenary, which was produced at the Lewisohn Stadium in New York. The same year he made "Macbeth" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" for James K. Hackett. A year later he made his first settings—those for "Faust"—for the Metropolitan Opera Company, beginning an association that lasted for the rest of his life.

His studios turned out an endless stream of

settings for plays, musical comedies, revues, and grand operas. About 1921 he supplemented his work in the theatre by making an excursion, lasting several years, into motion pictures. Motion-picture sets come, as a rule, rather under the head of architecture than of scene design, and so cannot be discussed at any length here. Suffice it to say that his imagination, his sense of design, and his profound knowledge of architectural styles made him as great an influence on the screen as he was on the stage.

All in all, the roster of his theatrical output between 1911 and 1932 is a chronicle of almost

The witch's house in "Hansl and Gretel," from a scene model (Metropolitan, 1927)



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unbelievable activity. I have gone over his studio records of those years, and have succeeded in making a reasonably complete list of his stage productions. Here it is:

For the Boston Opera Company, 30 productions in four years (1911-14); for the Metropolitan Opera Company, 55 productions in fifteen years (1917-31); for the Interstate Opera Company, 3 productions; for Florenz Ziegfeld, in twenty-one years, 12 "Follies" productions, 7 roof shows, and 18 musical comedies; for other musical-comedy producers, 26 productions; for play producers, 16 productions. These, together with "Caliban," make a total of 168 productions in twenty-two years. Since these aver-

thought of scenery in terms of stage direction. He was a great stage director, and the fact that he was not allowed to exercise more fully his talent for stage handling was a great loss to the theatre. At the Boston Opera House he had complete charge of the mis-en-scène—was responsible, in other words, not only for the settings and the lighting, but for the stage business as well. To realize how painstakingly he studied and planned every detail, read this brief extract from his notes for the Boston production of "The Tales of Hoffmann":

"Before the overture, at the moment when the house is darkened, the leader of the orchestra gives the sign for the raising of the great red



*A drawing for
"Pelléas et Mélisande," Act III,
Scene 3, made for
the Metropolitan
in 1924.*

aged at least three sets each, between 1911 and 1932 he must have designed and lighted something over 500 stage sets. The correct figure is probably nearer 700.



One feature of his work that does not show in the designs is its great practicability. No matter how solid and elaborate his settings looked, they were always possible to handle, and always easy to play against. He never started work on a set until he knew exactly how many people were to be on the stage, how and where they were supposed to come and go, and what they were supposed to be doing. Despite his tremendous graphic talent, he always

curtain. The second curtain (with the crown applications) can then be seen. The stage shows a gray cellar of an old inn. Blue light, thrown on the stage, comes from the upper back windows and the window of the staircase. At the moment the curtain rises Lindorf is seen on the staircase. He sings the opening bars as he reaches the last few steps. Andreas comes stumbling after him. Lindorf, who in the meantime has reached the doorway, stops and turns around. His red hair and wax-like face make a disagreeable contrast with the blue lighting. Both enter into a conversation on the staircase over a letter from Stella. During this conversation Lindorf remains in the same position, showing his profile."—And so on, for thirty type-written pages, illustrated with diagrams and ex-

Mr. Urban's costume sketches for the "Die Meister-singer," made for the Boston Opera Company production in 1911



quisite tiny water-color sketches of groupings and light effects.



Painting for light was only one of his contributions to the theatre. At their best, his stage settings show a boldness and originality of design that stamp him as a great artist. Designs like the lovely mediæval village in "Enchantment," the scene from "Flying High," the cemetery scene from "Don Giovanni," the single

setting for "Elektra," the glacier scene from "Jonny Spielt Auf," the mountain pass from "Ernani"—these are unmistakably signed "Joseph Urban." Nobody else could have done them.

He made extensive use of teasers and false prosceniums—"portals"—to alter the shape of the stage opening. Another characteristic of his work is the employment of a single large object (a tree, as in "Tristan," "Falstaff," or "La Vestale"; a statue, as in "Don Giovanni"; or a bridge, as in "Faust" and "Ernani") placed



Courtyard scene from "Macbeth," as photographed from the drawing. This was designed for James K. Hackett's production in 1915

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The imposing architectural setting for the first act of "La Vestale," from the drawing (Metropolitan, 1925)

just where no academic designer would have tolerated it—in the centre of the stage. Another is to frame a scene in graduated thicknesses of gauze in order to give it remoteness or unreality. Thus the gauze teaser in "Schwanda" emphasizes the "once-upon-a-time" element in the story; and a similar "pathos of distance" is achieved by the same means in the last scene of "Pelléas et Mélisande" and the dream scenes in "Peter Ibbetson."

He could be impressively realistic when the occasion required. No one ever painted or

lighted such convincing rocks, stone walls, and foliage as Joseph Urban. That he could be literally exact in architectural designs goes without saying. The first-act sets for "La Vestale" and "Carmen," and some of the sets for "Don Carlos" and "Fra Gherardo" are almost photographic in their literalness. But it is literalness on a grand scale. Many of his most brilliantly imaginative sets were made for the most trivial projects; for it was precisely in productions—the "Follies," for instance—where he was not restricted by the historical or mechanical demands



One of Mr. Urban's most striking designs, from his drawing for the first act of "Ernani" (Metropolitan, 1921)



Setting for the Antonia scene from "The Tales of Hoffmann," designed for the Boston Opera Company in 1912. The illustration was taken from the scene model

of a plot, where his only task was to provide gorgeous color and beautiful designs, that his fancy was at its freest and happiest.

The magnitude and significance of his work is by no means as yet fully appreciated. It is still possible for a modern art museum to open

an exhibit of stage designs without including a single example of Joseph Urban's work, for Lee Simonson to publish a book on theatre art that contains only a single, perfunctory mention of Urban's name.

There are several reasons for this. One is his



The artist's conception of the same scene as that above, as designed for the Metropolitan Opera Company twelve years later. This is from the drawing



The palace of the Ice Queen from "Schwanda" (Metropolitan 1931), photographed from the actual set

Photograph by Carlo Edwards

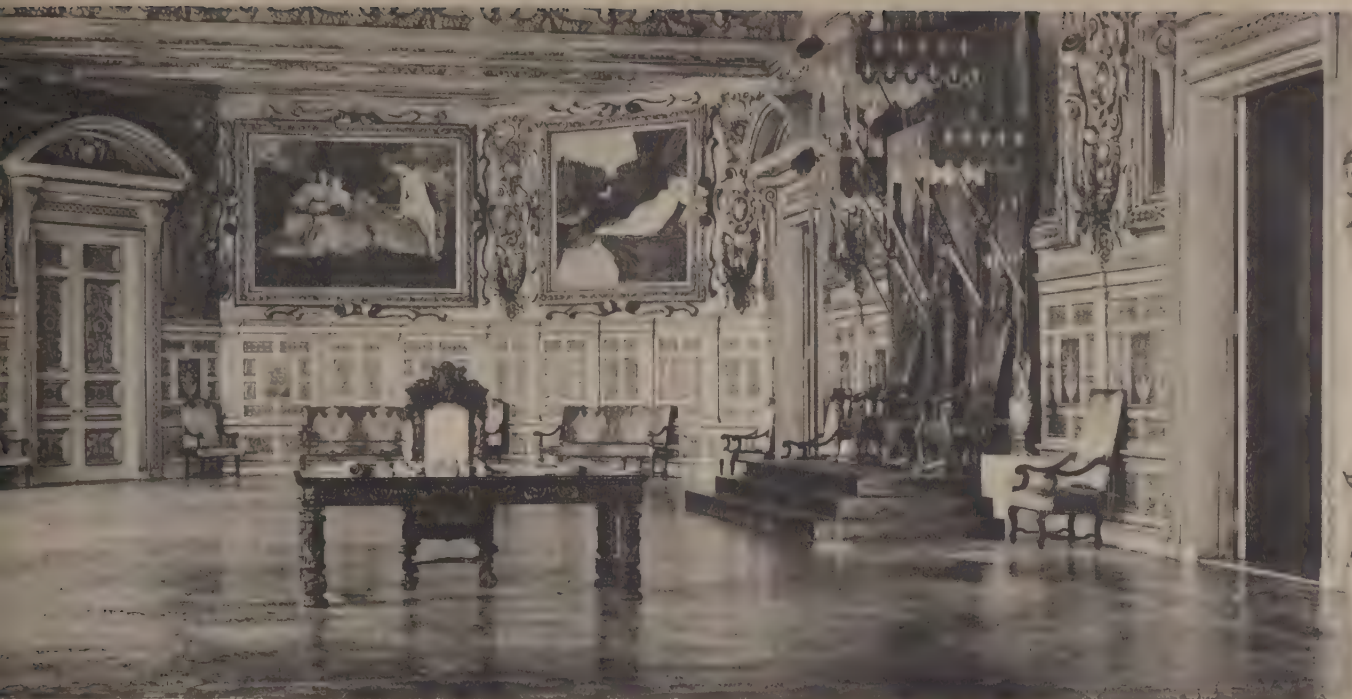
extraordinary many-sidedness, which has made it difficult to put him into any convenient category. There were three Joseph Urbans working in the theatre. One was the poetic illustrator whose sensitive and whimsical imagination had invented the illustrations for Hans Andersen's fairy tales, the fairy-tale calendar, and "The Three Princesses." Another was the ultra-modern decorative artist who conceived the color scheme for the Chicago Exposition and designed smart hotel bars and the Katharine

Brush apartment. The third was the architect who designed the Tsar's Bridge and the Hutton House and the Ziegfeld Theatre. The three formed a sort of one-man guild, that could devise anything to suit anybody's taste. You could have what you wanted of his gifts—fantasy, realism, abstract decoration, architectural solidity. He could do superbly many things that his contemporaries could not do at all. And because he stood for more than a single phase of his art, he could not be trade-marked; and a



Photograph by Carlo Edwards

The city gate from "Schwanda," Act I. Note the gauze false proscenium

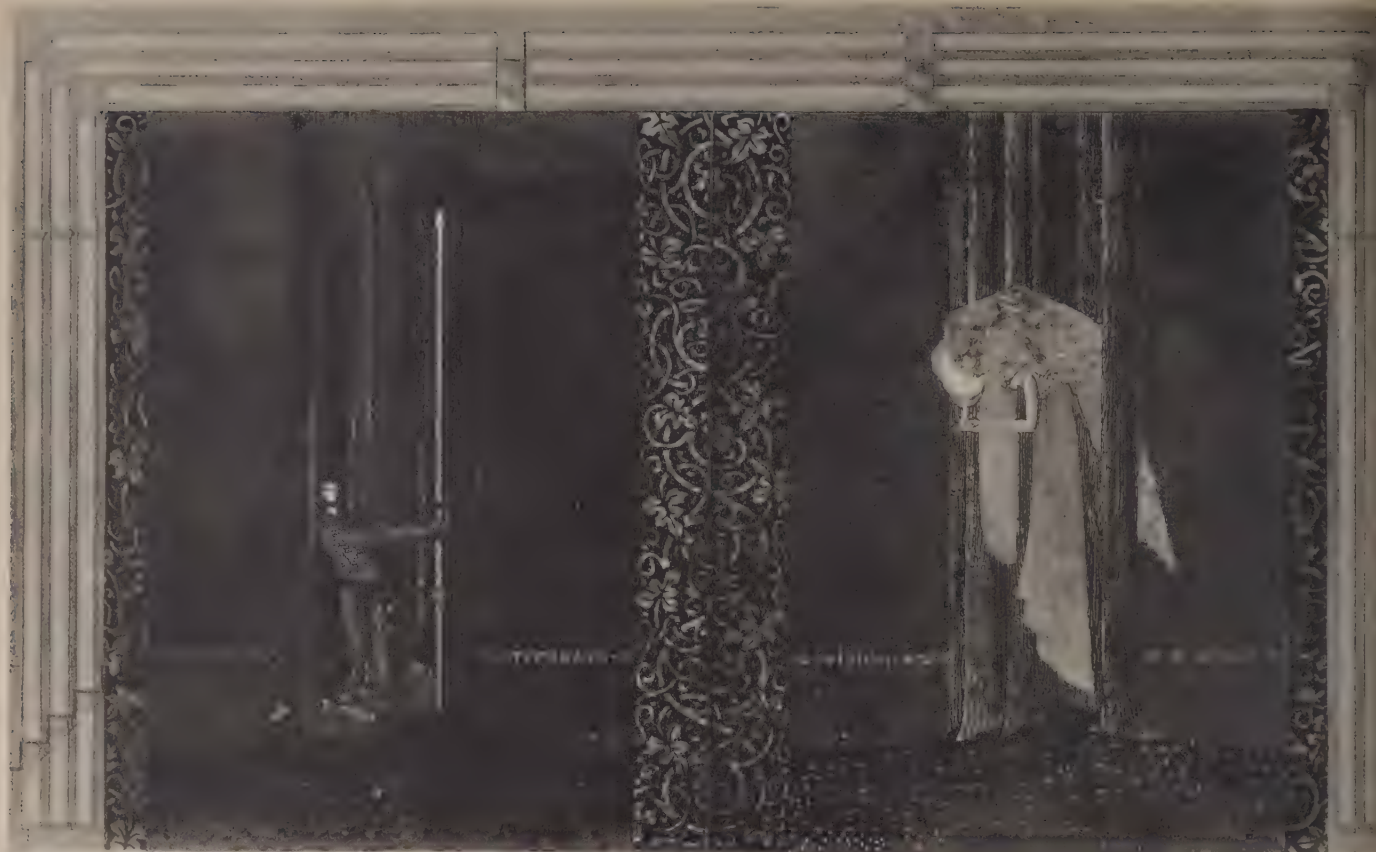


A motion-picture set: The throne room from "Under the Red Robe"
Medieval Village (miniature set) from the motion picture, "Enchantment"



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Special tableau curtains—Titarel's Vision—designed for the Metropolitan's production of "Parsifal" (1919)

The drawing for "Cosi Fan Tutte" (Metropolitan, 1921). The ornamental drop curtain remains in place throughout the action. The small scenes are wheeled into place on wagon stages



*Design for Act III
—Campus Sceleratus—of “La Vestale,” as produced
by the Metropolitan (1925)*



man who cannot be trade-marked is at a disadvantage in an era of specialization.

Likewise, he suffered from inexpert and perfunctory criticism. Working, as he did, largely in the fields of musical comedy and grand opera, he was fated to have the bulk of his work reviewed either by second-string dramatic critics, or—what is worse—music critics. A few of the first-class men—John Corbin, for instance, and

H. T. Parker of the *Boston Transcript*—recognized his value; but most of the newspaper critics seemed incapable of passing constructive judgment upon him. Concerning his beautiful settings for Fevrier's "Monna Vanna," Boston's most venerable music critic could find only this to say: "Weak, colorless, and tiresome as is this music, the performance last night aroused enthusiasm, and the mounting of the opera pleased



A modernistic setting—photographed from the scene model, from George White's production of "Flying High" (1930)

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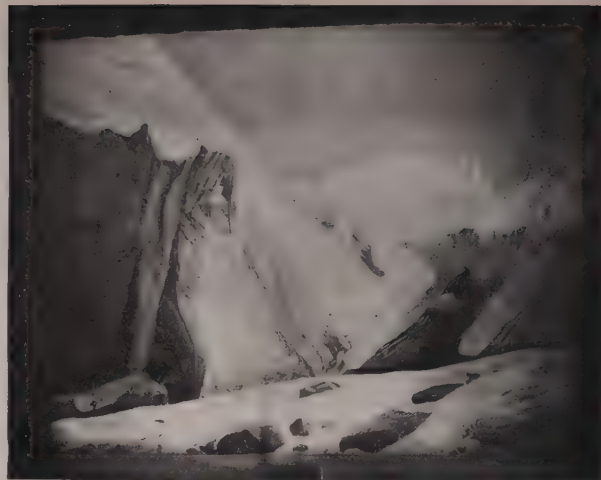
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the eye" (italics mine). One otherwise intelligent and erudite New York critic violently condemned Urban's setting of the garden scene from "Tristan"—why? Because it was poor in design? Because it was inappropriate? Because it was bad in color and lighting? Guess again. Because it caused Mark and Melot to enter from the right instead of from the back!

But his greatest misfortune, as well as his greatest glory, is the fact that his contributions to his art were so fundamental that they are taken for granted. Prior to his time, the bulk of American scenery was designed by corporations—The Lee Lash Studios, Dodge and Castle, and the like. These were firms engaged in the worthy business of building and painting scenery, and art played little part in their cosmos. Urban not only revolutionized technique; he revolutionized the scene designer's position in the American theatrical world. He was the first to make it clear that the designing of stage sets is an art, and that the man who designs them is an artist—or should be. Yet I have heard a lofty indifference to his work expressed by youngsters who stole what ideas and technique they possess from men who stole theirs from Urban.



He committed the sin of being a practical man of the theatre as well as an artist. As a rule, the stage designer who gets admiring attention in the best critical circles is the one who makes drawings for a theatre that he hopes to God may some day exist. The two great prophets of the



Photograph by Carlo Edwards

The glacier scene from "Jonny Spielt Auf" (Metropolitan, 1928), as photographed from the completed stage set

modern theatre were Adolph Appia and Gordon Craig. Both were men of talent and undoubted originality; yet both exist today as a few portfolios of drawings, some of which saw the light as actual stage sets, and most of which did not—because they couldn't be built. Urban had little time for theories. He saw the contemporary theatre as it was, and accepted it, and fought it, and loved it, and conquered it. He proved that scenery for an ordinary, run-of-the-mine, commercial Broadway show could be beautiful, and that the public would respond to that beauty. And in the process of so doing he virtually remade the American theatre, and put every scenic artist in America in his debt. Some day that debt may be repaid.



An early setting for the Boston Opera Company (1912)—Act I of "Monna Vanna," photographed from the actual set



House of Perry M. Duncan, Bronxville, N. Y.

PERRY M. DUNCAN and C. CABELL GARRETT, ARCHITECTS

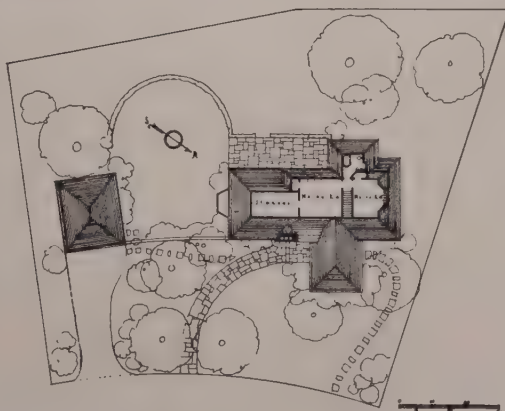


Photographs by Harold D. Eberlein, except on page 294

Below, plot plan showing also the third floor, with storage space, two maid's rooms, and a bath



The first-floor plan is quite unusual, both in the short hall extending directly across the study wing and the corner entrance to the living-room



On the second floor there is an effective division of the sumptuous master's suite, the children's quarters, and the guest room in the wing



The west or garden front, the terrace facing out upon a broad expanse of golf links

The main entrance on the east front. The house plan has been very closely fitted between the existing tall trees



The west terrace, paved with bluestone flagging, and the south end opening out of the living-room





The west terrace. For the walls the architects have used three courses of brick on edge to one course of headers, resulting in an unusual text of brick wall. The whole has been white-washed. All exterior woodwork is painted a light gray-blue

« ARCHITECTURE »

MAY, 1934



Photograph by George H. Van Anda

The guest room, being in a wing of its own, gave the architects an opportunity for opening the ceiling up to the ridge

◀ ARCHITECTURE ▶

MAY, 1934

Thursday, March 1.—Hildreth Meière brought back from her travels this summer in Norway, Sweden, France, and Italy a strong impression of the importance the people attach, particularly in Norway, to their mural painting. There are very few new buildings over there, but such as they have, they decorate with great freedom. Whether a room is used for a library, railroad-ticket selling, trade-union meetings, or merely the school-room, it is considered well worth while to paint its walls, and tell thereon a story.

Friday, March 2.—The New York Chapter, A. I. A., on the occasion of its annual dinner tonight honored itself by giving to Robert D. Kohn its Medal of Honor for 1933. Ralph Walker, president of the Chapter, cited Mr. Kohn "for devoted and inspired national leadership of the architectural profession; for initiating the unification of the building industry; for great vision, understanding and continued national effort for the betterment of humanity in housing and city planning; for high ideals as a man; for fine qualities as an architect."

In accepting the medal Mr. Kohn, after fitting words of appreciation, found it difficult to conceal his personal disappointment over the progress, or lack of progress, of the government's housing programme. Nevertheless, when one considers the state of the public mind regarding housing as it obtained two years ago, and the widespread interest in the subject today, the progress is unquestionably encouraging. Mr. Kohn feels that the next five or ten years will show the greatest onward march of public housing in the history of civilization.

Langdon Post, heading the new Housing Authority of New York, spoke in due humility with regard to the task his little group of five members faces in New York City.

Charles W. Eliot, II, secretary of the National Planning Board under the P. W. A., gave us an encouraging outlook over the possibilities that lie ahead of us in the planned economies of tomorrow.

Monday, March 5.—Lunched with Clarence Stein and Charles Butler, when we were not able to stay for very long away from Doctor Butler's favorite topic of architectural education. Incidentally, he will have completed, on the occasion of the next A. I. A. convention, a term of three and a half years as chairman of the Institute's Committee on Education. We did have time to discuss and look over the ingenious scheme devised by Mr. Stein for the making of working drawings covering the Hillside housing project. Standardization on a building unit, of course, is a big part of the scheme, but there had to be numerous devices introduced to avoid the miles of elevation drawings involved. I am trying to get Mr. Stein to explain the organization of this task in an early issue.



The Editor's Diary

Tuesday, March 6. Up late reading Louis Sullivan's "Kindergarten Chats." Here was a series of particularly individualistic talks for a young architectural student, as they appeared during a whole year's issues of a weekly journal long since defunct. It was startling to find how much of a prophet Louis Sullivan was when these were written thirty-three years ago. His lance was aimed with peculiar ferocity at any architectural shams which, while not entirely gone, are waning. Claude Bragdon has brought these "Kindergarten Chats" together, and I trust is going to put them into a book, a book without which any architectural student's education would be sadly incomplete.

Wednesday, March 7.—Attended a meeting in Mr. Rockefeller's office at which William G. Perry, of Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, and Messrs. Chorley and Norton, of Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., met the architectural editors. Here is a very important architectural project—the most important piece of research and reconstruction concerned with our early architecture. The problem presented to the editors of the various architectural journals was how best can the results of this research be made available for the use of the profession. The problem proved too complex to be solved today, but we are hopeful of finding the right way out.

Thursday, March 8.—Deems Taylor at The Architectural League today told us of an idea that has been shaping in his mind for some years concerning the future of opera in this country. Opera as we now know it can probably be enjoyed more thoroughly over the radio than by going to the Metropolitan Opera House. Opera has become a sort of embalmed set of traditional gestures accompanying the music. The fact that an opera star can step off the boat one afternoon in New York and step on the stage of the Metropolitan in any of the well-known operas that evening, without the necessity for rehearsal, indicates that, once a première is produced, say in 1876, the presentation of that opera remains unchanged in all parts of the world thereafter. The same character takes the same number of steps, four to the

right, or six to the left on certain notes, and no one would think of failing to follow the procedure. In fact so utterly embalmed is the process that when some one like the late Joseph Urban comes along and designs a new setting, new lighting, and similar changes in keeping with the advance of modern technique, the musical critics scold because the star's entrance is at the side instead of at the back as it has always been.

Well, anyway, Deems Taylor thinks that what we need in the opera is more theatre and less aristocracy. As he rather neatly puts it, the day has passed when one goes to the opera to see the box-holders. Having seen one box-holder, one has practically seen all box-holders.

We need also a modern theatre for opera, such for instance as that in Rockefeller Center. In the present Metropolitan Opera House, which seats thirty-nine hundred, one thousand seats have an obstructed view of the stage, and five hundred seats have no view of the stage.

It's a grand idea, this making opera an enjoyable thing for the public, in which we combine a good theatre, the modern advances in the technique of the theatre, good voices, actors who have some physical resemblance to the characters they portray, and a top price perhaps of three dollars.

Saturday, March 10.—Professor Philip B. Bucky, of Columbia University, says that with the aid of a machine he has designed it is cheaper to build under ground than above ground. With conditioned air and artificial lighting there will be little objection to building under ground, particularly since we have the great advantage of a temperature that is almost constant at sixty-two degrees Fahrenheit. Perhaps we are about ready for the mole era.

Sunday, March 11.—Up to witness the dedication of the Pilgrim's Pavement, which is the marble floor in the nave of Cram & Ferguson's Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Services are held in the choir and crossing, the nave itself being walled off. The latter is complete except for the outside of the west front, and as it stands perhaps third in height among the cathedrals of the world, its size is tremendously impressive, even without chairs or a congregation to give it scale.

Monday, March 12.—Henry S. Churchill writes an article, "Begin Housing Now!" in *The Nation* for February 14, in which he tries to find a way out of the present impasse. In effect, the Housing Division of the P. W. A. says to a community: "Show us a good scheme for housing which in thirty years will pay for itself, and we will loan you the money to build it. We might even make you a grant of thirty per cent of the cost of labor and materials." Nothing much

has happened, because of the apparent impossibility of finding in one place the acceptable scheme and the ability to furnish the necessary equity. Churchill's argument is that amortization is merely a means of making the tenant pay the owner for the property. Under private ownership this is customary and proper. If, however, we are going to regard housing as a social matter, a matter in which we may have to use the right of eminent domain and some means of allocating the housing to those unable to pay for commercial housing, why not go all the way? Why should not, he argues, the government finance as it does other public buildings through bond issues and taxes? After all, aside from the thirty-per-cent grant, all we are offering to do for the low-income class is to build something a little better for them and build it more economically. We have not yet faced the fact that under the present economic setup the low-income classes cannot afford to pay even the lowest rentals that are in sight.

Tuesday, March 13.—Squeezed into the huge throng attending Varnishing Day before the opening of the National Academy's Exhibition. Aside from the fact that there is too much material crowded into the Fine Arts Building on 57th Street, the show is good. The more I wander around, the more I see our exhibitions overloaded with extremely modern work—which, of course, is not the case here in the National Academy show—the more firmly I am convinced of this fact: Assuming that art is a means of expressing something that will give pleasure to others, I am all for the one who expresses his message beautifully. There are those who will tell me that I may not know what this picture is, but it is some one's earnest effort to get over a message. That being the case, I feel that I would far rather listen to him express the message in words than in paint. Judging from the bulk of what I see in the modern exhibits, I should have to listen to many sad stories, but I believe I could endure these more comfortably in words than in color or form.

Thursday, March 15.—I saw tonight at the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design one of the best student problems in many years. The programme called for the design of a church interior, with particular reference to its lighting. The Illuminating Engineering Society was awarding money prizes of considerable size, and there were turned in a total of 209 projects from all over the country. The result was a rather startling indication of what the architects of tomorrow are thinking, particularly as regards illumination. Here are some of the straws in the wind: In less than 15 per cent of the schemes was there suggested equipment which would normally be made by the lighting-fixture industry as it is now organized. In less than 10 per cent were

shown fixtures as such, and, even in the majority of these, the fixture was merely a container for light-control equipment. Thirty-three per cent lighted the structure from units recessed above the ceiling. About 25 per cent had as their principal light source indirect illumination from the side walls. In 16 per cent stained-glass windows and wall grilles, lighted from the rear, were the principal light sources.

Ely Kahn had much to do with this effort of the school to have the student think in terms of the materials he is using, rather than merely in terms of pattern, trick rendering, and the other connotations of paper architecture. As he said tonight, what a wonderful thing it would be for the student if he could have most of his problems put up to him in the terms of materials and methods of today! Following the lead of the Illuminating Engineering Society, the American Institute of Steel Construction might well further a problem that would make the student think in terms of steel—some problem other than the annual bridge design the Institute has sponsored. In the same way, the Copper and Brass Research Association, and other representative bodies covering stone, marble, terra-cotta, glass, brick, and so on, could direct the student's thought into new and profitable channels.

Saturday, March 17.—I see that Harrie T. Lindeberg has been selected as architect for the American Embassy in Moscow, and is shortly to go over for a preliminary survey of the building site.



Monday, March 19.—Kenneth Reid and I had the pleasure of a personally conducted tour by Professor Eugene Steinhof through his art school in the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design. The essence of the Steinhof method of teaching, apparently, is to free the student's mind as fully as possible from all preconceived notions—not always an easy matter. The student who comes utterly unprepared seems to make faster progress than one who has studied under some other system. The details involved are much too intricate to be set down here, even if I had fully understood them, which I fear is not the case.

Wednesday, March 21.—Philip Sawyer was telling me today an amusing incident in connection with the huge wrought-iron lanterns on the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. Being somewhat dubious about the scale of these unusually large fixtures, he had a flimsy model made of one, using cardboard, tin, rope, and shoe-blackening, to get a general effect. The model was hung on the building, and, with several others, Mr. Sawyer was debating the matter of scale from across the street. A woman marched by, looked up at the

flimsy model, across at the group of men, hesitated, stopped, and came across. Going unerringly to Sawyer, who admitted that he was the architect of the building, she said: "I hope you will not mind my saying it, but the lantern is not worthy of the building." "Madam," said Sawyer, "I had just reached precisely that conclusion, and I assure you that it shall be changed."

Thursday, March 22.—Ely Kahn tonight told us something of his travels around the world, illustrating his remarks with lantern slides from his own negatives, among which those of Bali and the Ganges were perhaps the most interesting. Incidentally, in Bali he found the most effective form of art instruction—largely because of its direct connection with the materials used and the absence of all abstruse theories.

Saturday, March 24.—Albert Mayer, Henry Wright and Lewis Mumford have each written an article on housing in *The New Republic*. As a finale, the three men unite in presenting a concrete programme for American housing. This is well worth reading, and it will startle the reader. Upon a sound basis of facts they build a vision of what might be if this country really roused itself to action. The article is already boiled down to its essence, so that it would be futile to attempt a digest. It should be read.

Monday, March 26.—There is considerable cause for concern over the tendency in the past few months to make architecture a communal effort. With architects and draftsmen enrolled under C. W. A., it was all too easy a matter for any one of a city's departments, being in need of designing service, to utilize the C. W. A. men for this purpose. The danger lies not in the fact that the city got this or that particular architectural job at the Federal government's expense, but rather the fact that such architectural work is not supported by the essential foundation necessary for professional service—responsibility. The men in C. W. A. are here today and gone tomorrow. If the architecture they designed is not properly done, possibly not safely done, there is no responsibility involved and no recourse. On the other hand, the architectural practitioners who have been striving against mighty odds to maintain an office and its organization are in existence to supply a real need of the community. The community should beware lest its lack of foresight brings down upon it a whole train of evils. The family doctor is always available, and the feeling that we can call upon him at will is comforting. If, however, we have his work taken over by a temporary bureau of internes, without his knowledge and experience, two things will happen: our ills will not be so capably treated, and the family physician will soon disappear.

THE NINETY-FIRST IN A SERIES OF COLLECTIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHS
ILLUSTRATING VARIOUS MINOR ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

ARCHITECTURE'S PORTFOLIO OF RUSTICATION

*Subjects of previous portfolios are listed below
at left and right of page*



*Below are the subjects of
forthcoming Portfolios*

Organ Cases

JUNE

Garden Furniture

JULY

Window Heads, Exterior

AUGUST

Spires

SEPTEMBER

Business Building Lobbies

OCTOBER

Roof Trusses

NOVEMBER

*Photographs showing interesting
examples under any of these head-
ings will be welcomed by the Edi-
tor, though it should be noted that
these respective issues are made up
about six weeks in advance of
publication date.*

❖ 1926
DORMER WINDOWS
SHUTTERS AND BLINDS

❖ 1927
ENGLISH PANELLING
GEORGIAN STAIRWAYS
STONE MASONRY TEXTURES
ENGLISH CHIMNEYS
FANLIGHTS AND OVERDOORS
TEXTURES OF BRICKWORK
IRON RAILINGS
DOOR HARDWARE
PALLADIAN MOTIVES
GABLE ENDS
COLONIAL TOP-RAILINGS
CIRCULAR AND OVAL WINDOWS

❖ 1928
BUILT-IN BOOKCASES
CHIMNEY TOPS
DOOR HOODS
BAY WINDOWS
CUPOLAS
GARDEN GATES
STAIR ENDS
BALCONIES
GARDEN WALLS
ARCADES
PLASTER CEILINGS
CORNICES OF WOOD

❖ 1929
DOORWAY LIGHTING
ENGLISH FIREPLACES
GATE-POST TOPS
GARDEN STEPS
RAIN LEADER HEADS
GARDEN POOLS
QUOINS
INTERIOR PAVING
BELT COURSES
KEYSTONES
AIDS TO FENESTRATION
BALUSTRADES

❖ 1930
SPANDRELS
CHANCEL FURNITURE
BUSINESS BUILDING ENTRANCES
GARDEN SHELTERS
ELEVATOR DOORS
ENTRANCE PORCHES

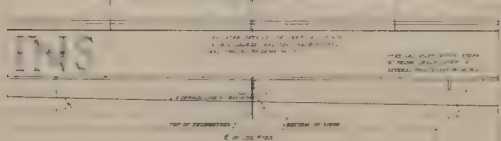
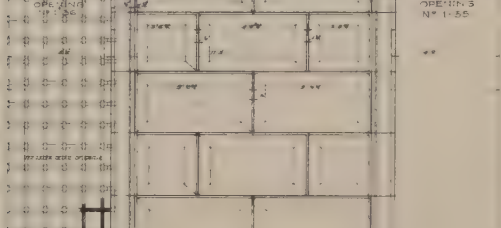
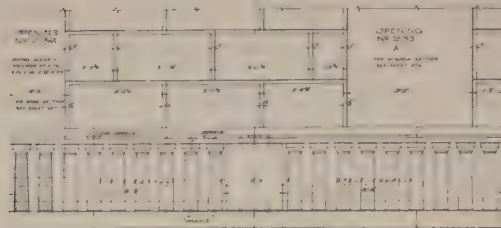
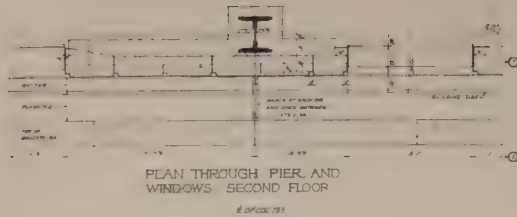
1930 ❖
PATIOS
TREILLAGE
FLAGPOLE HOLDERS
CASEMENT WINDOWS
FENCES OF WOOD
GOTHIC DOORWAYS

1931 ❖
BANKING-ROOM CHECK DESKS
SECOND-STORY PORCHES
TOWER CLOCKS
ALTARS
GARAGE DOORS
MAIL-CHUTE BOXES
WEATHER-VANES
BANK ENTRANCES
URNS
WINDOW GRILLES
CHINA CUPBOARDS
PARAPETS

1932 ❖
RADIATOR ENCLOSURES
INTERIOR CLOCKS
OUTSIDE STAIRWAYS
LEADED GLASS MEDALLIONS
EXTERIOR DOORS OF WOOD
METAL FENCES
HANGING SIGNS
WOOD CEILINGS
MARQUISES
WALL SHEATHING
FRENCH STONEMWORK
OVER-MANTEL TREATMENTS

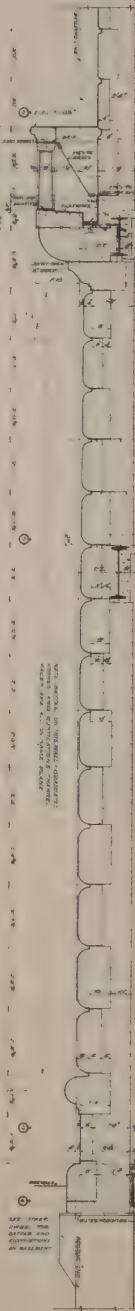
1933 ❖
BANK SCREENS
INTERIOR DOORS
METAL STAIR RAILINGS
VERANDAS
THE EAGLE IN SCULPTURE
EAVES RETURNS ON MASONRY
GABLES
EXTERIOR LETTERING
ENTRANCE DRIVEWAYS
CORBELS
PEW ENDS
GOTHIC NICHES
CURTAIN TREATMENT AT
WINDOWS

1934 ❖
EXTERIOR PLASTERWORK
CHURCH DOORS
FOUNTAINS
MODERN ORNAMENT



TYPICAL BAY AND PIER, LIBERTY ST. ELEVATION
FIRST TO SECOND FLOOR.

SEE SHEETS NY 101 FOR DETAILS FOR OTHER DETAILS RELATING TO THIS SHOWN ON THIS SHEET.

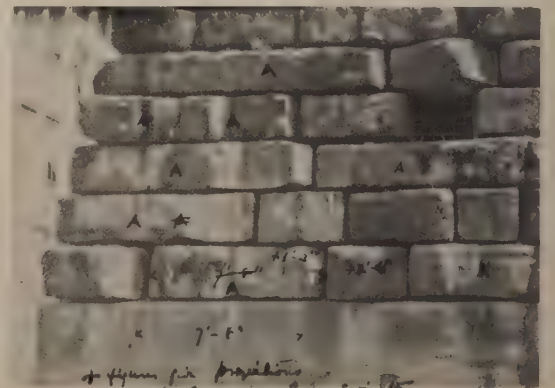


SECTION



If any one thinks that rustication consists merely in making deep joints for the sake of rugged emphasis in stonework, his mind will be disabused of that thought by a careful study of the illustrations on this and the opposite page.

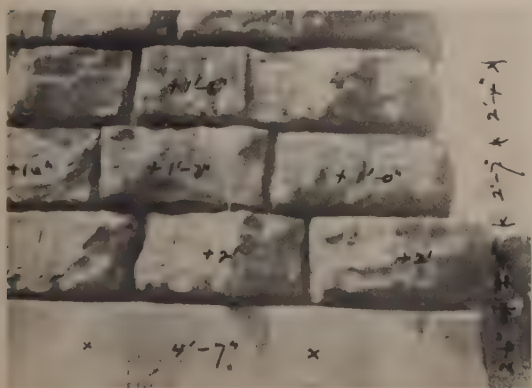
To the left is York & Sawyer's $\frac{3}{4}$ "-scale detail of a bay and pier on the Liberty Street elevation, first to second floor, Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The height of the stone courses, it will be noticed, is graduated from the base to the top. The bottom course is $2' 6\frac{3}{4}"$ high, and the top course just under the balcony, $1' 11\frac{1}{2}"$ high. Moreover, the back face of the channeling



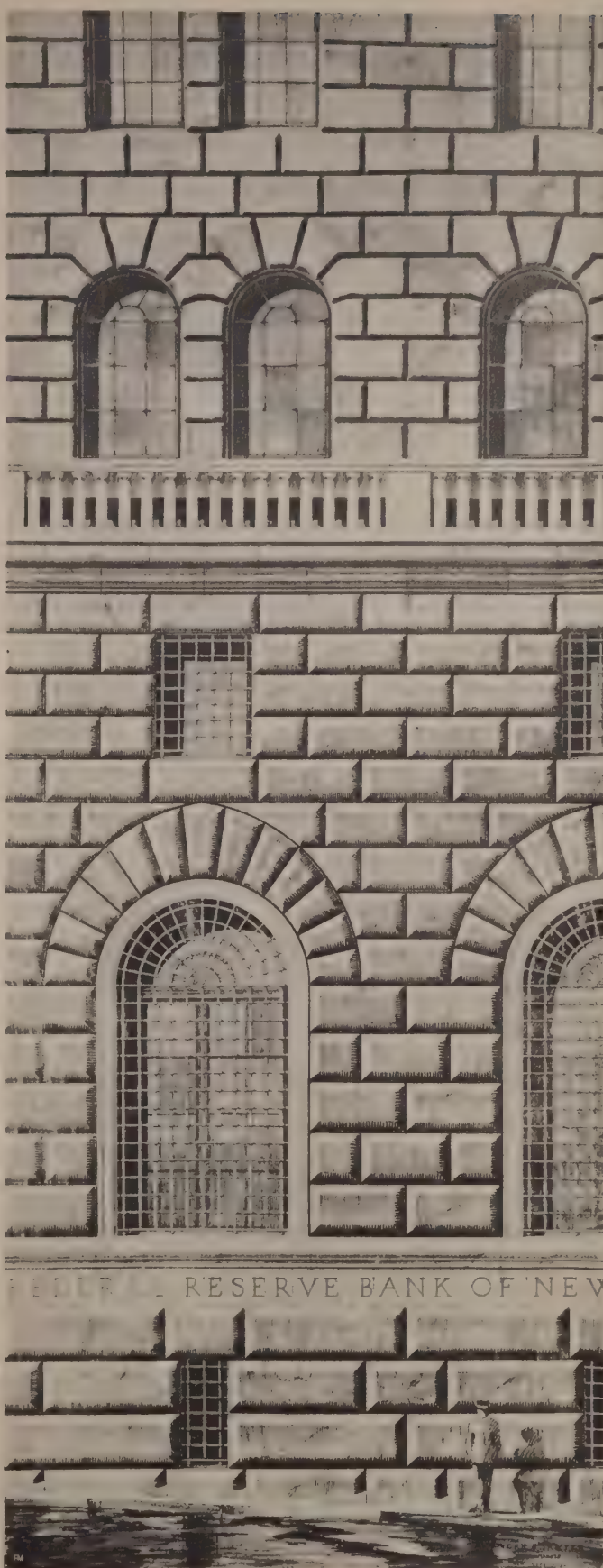
Pitti Palace, Florence, from a photograph by Mr. Sawyer, on which he has indicated with "A" the tight joints



is on a vertical plane, but the front faces of the stone courses slope back from bottom to top with a total batter of 2". This, of course, decreases the depth of the channels from 6" at the bottom to 4" at the top. It will be noticed also, that over the arches where the apparent stone face would come to a feather edge, the actual stone jointing does not follow the channel and, therefore, is made as inconspicuous as possible. The two photographs at the top of these pages give an idea of the vigor and subtlety of this notable example of rustication. At the right is a reproduction of the $\frac{3}{4}$ "-scale preliminary study in pencil



The Pitti Palace, again from one of Mr. Sawyer's photographs, the plus figures representing projection from the channel





Apartment house entrance, New York City
Charles A. Platt



Andrew Freedman Home, New York City
Joseph H. Freedlander

American Legion Post, Pasadena
Marston & Maybury

Apartment house, New York City
Cross & Cross





The arch connecting Piccadilly with the Quadrant of Regent Street, London

*International Telephone Building, New York City
The Firm of Ely Jacques Kahn*



*Elks National Headquarters, Chicago
Egerton Swartwout*

*City Hall, Waltham, Mass.
Kilham, Hopkins & Greeley*





Central Savings Bank, New York City
York & Sawyer



Drexel Building, Philadelphia
Charles Z. Klauder

Hotel Pierre, New York City
Schultze & Weaver



Academy of Design, New York City
McKim, Mead & White





*Webster Hall, Detroit
Halpin & Jewell*



*Casa Italia, Columbia University
McKim, Mead & White*

*Tooled concrete, Kensico Dam, New York
York & Sawyer*

*Detroit Institute of Arts
Paul P. Cret; Zantzinger, Borie & Medary*





Racquet and Tennis Club, New York City
McKim, Mead & White

George Gould Residence, New York City
Horace Trumbauer



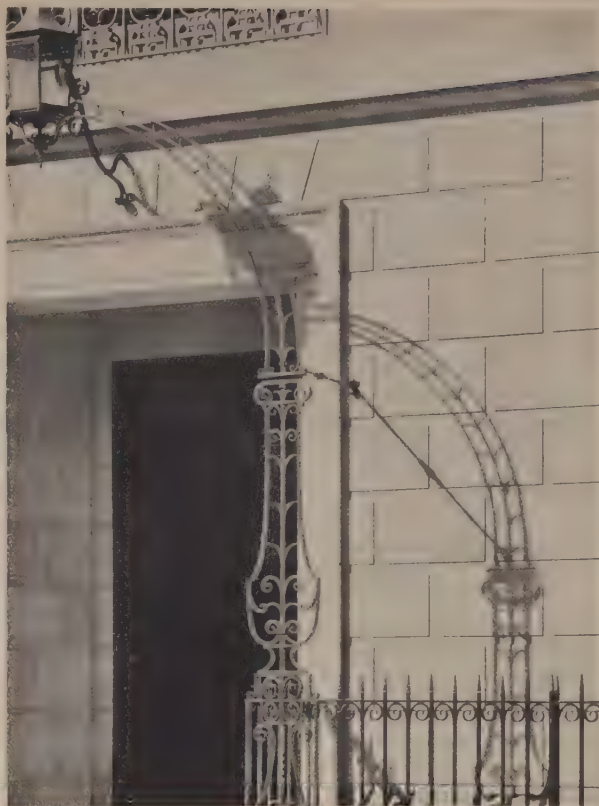
H. C. Frick Residence, New York City
Carrère & Hastings

Remodelled Gould Stable, New York City
York & Sawyer





Academy of Design, New York City
McKim, Mead & White

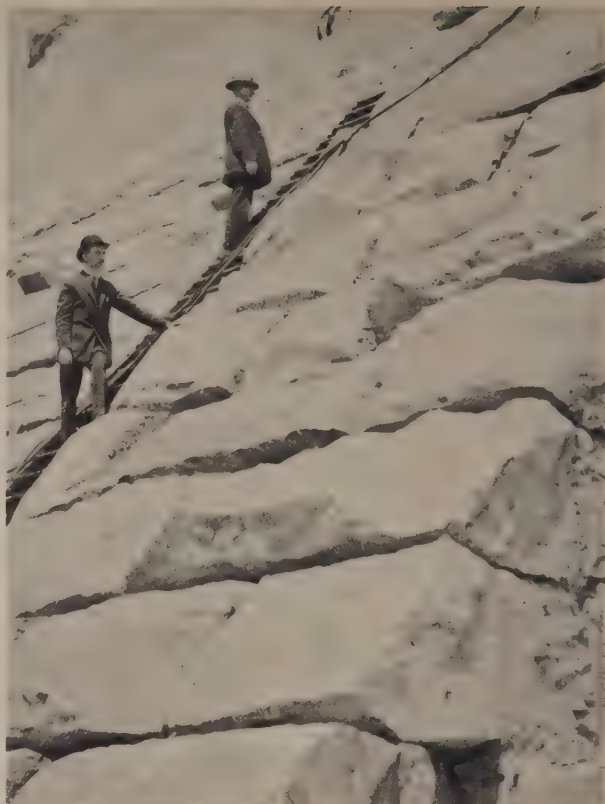


Lawyers' Club, New York City
Cass Gilbert

Plaza Trust Company, New York City
Corbett, Harrison & McMurray

Elks Building, Brooklyn
McKim, Mead & White





*Kensico Dam, New York
York & Sawyer*

*Integrity Trust Company, Philadelphia
Paul P. Cret*



An example in Rome





First National Bank, Boston



New York Athletic Club

Department of Commerce, Washington
York & Sawyer



Arcade and loggia, Vicenza
Andrea Palladio





Masonic Temple, Ansonia, Conn.
Douglas Orr

© Amemva

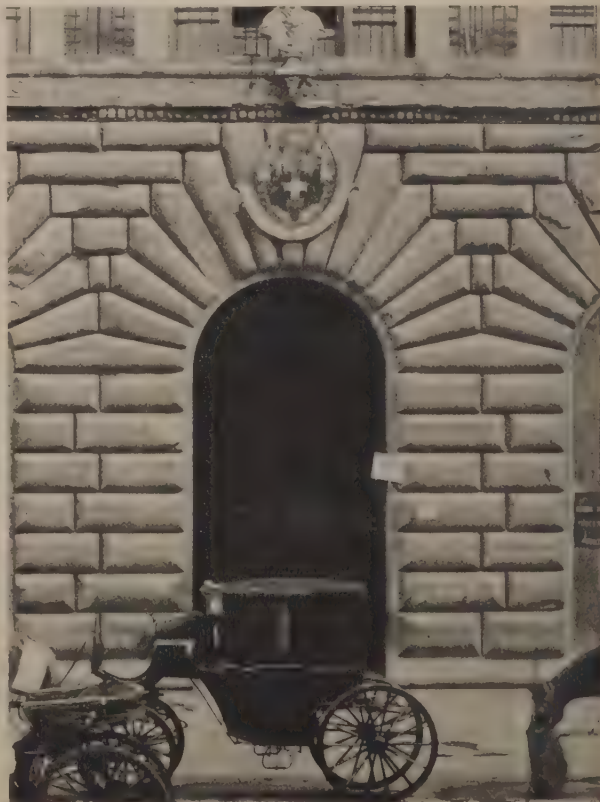


Brooklyn Trust Company
York & Sawyer

Bureau of Internal Revenue, Washington
Supervising Architect's Office

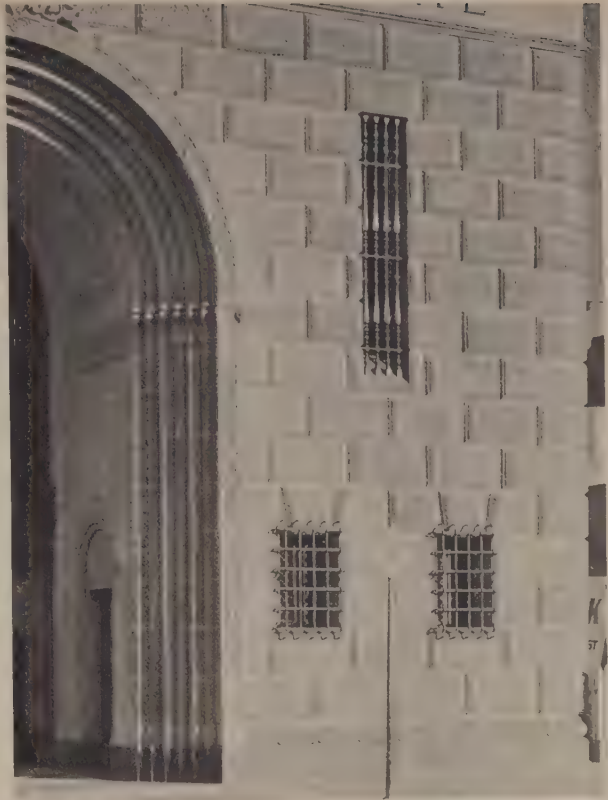


Palazzo Uguccioni, Florence





*Rubbed brick
Saffron Walden, England*



*Union National Bank, Ventura, Calif.
Morgan, Walls & Clements*



*Palazzo Bevilacqua, Bologna
Bramante (?)*

*Passaic, N. J., National Bank
Harry Leslie Walker*





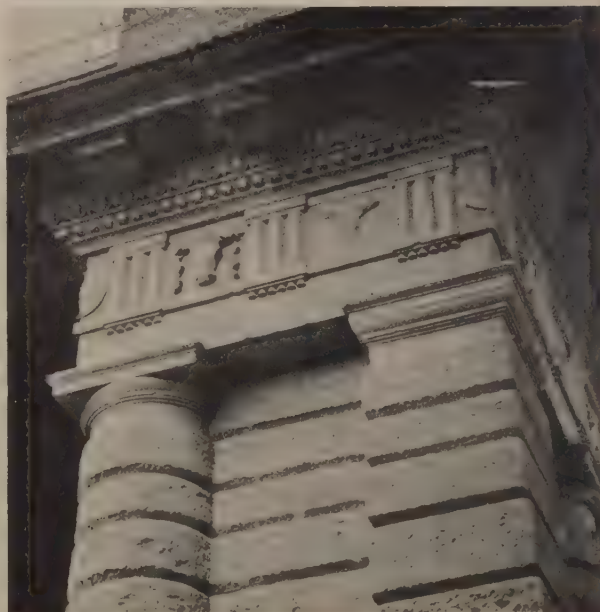
Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence
Michelozzo



U. S. Assay Office, New York City
York & Sawyer

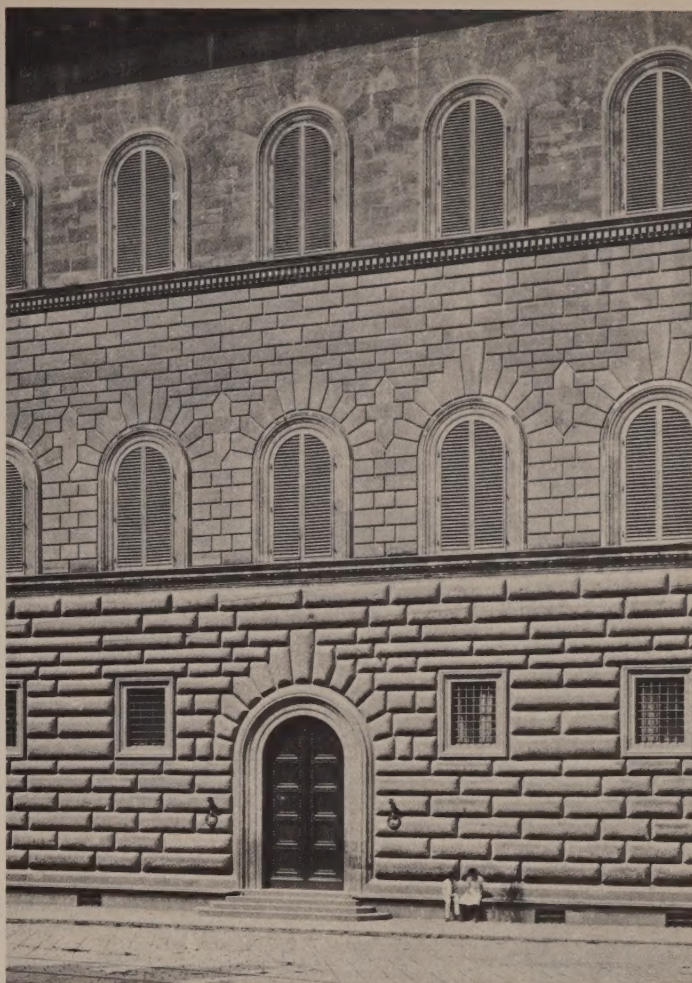
A. I. du Pont garden, Nemours, Del.
Massena & du Pont

Porta del Palio, Verona
Michele Sanmichele





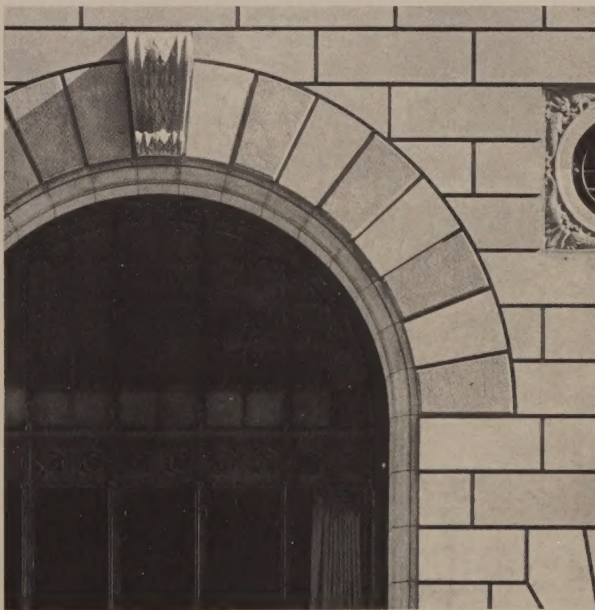
Royal Bank of Canada, Montreal
York & Sawyer



Palazzo Gondi, Florence

Palazzo Strozzi, Florence
Giuliano da Maiano

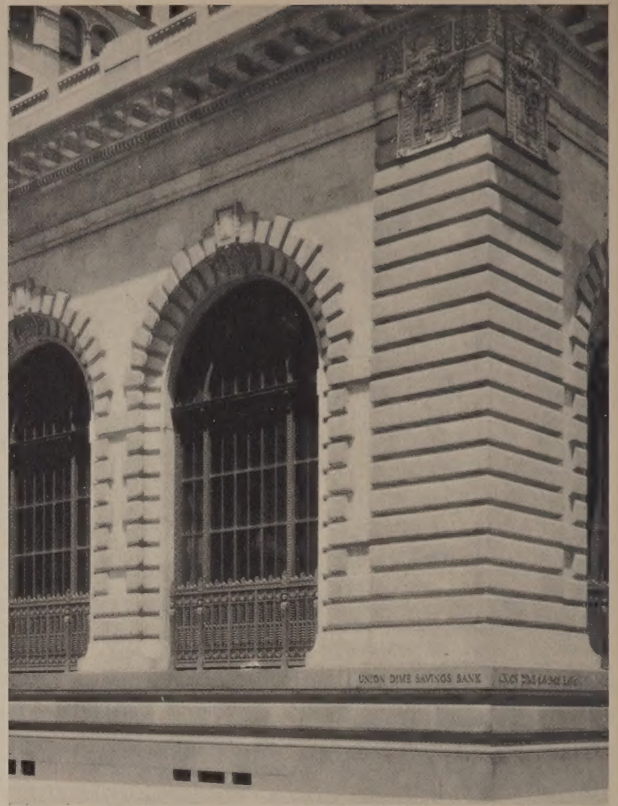
Corn Exchange Bank, New York City
Cross & Cross





*New York Public Library
Carrère & Hastings*

*House of W. B. Osgood Field, New York City
Hunt & Hunt*

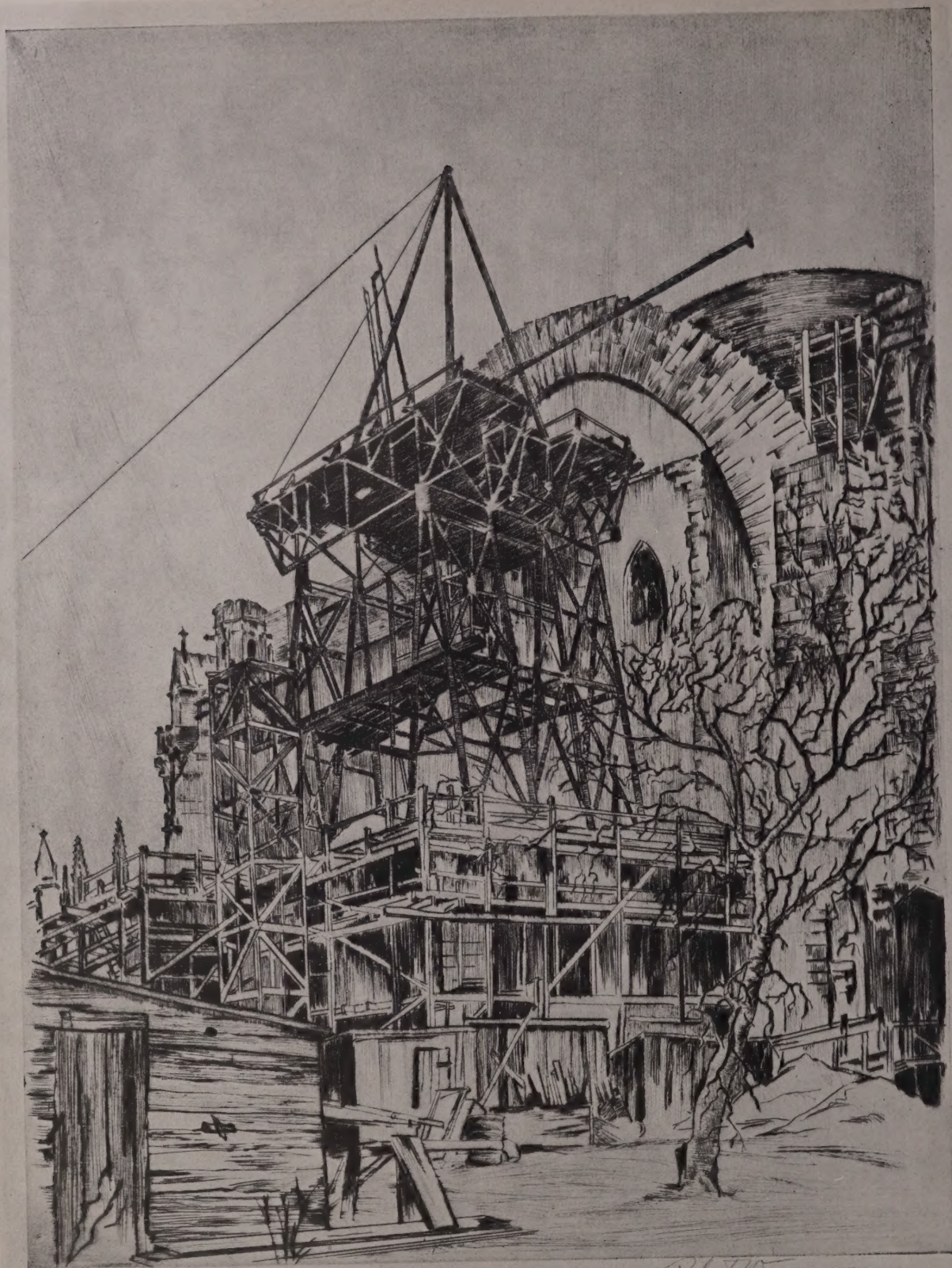


*Union Dime Savings Bank, New York City
Alfred H. Taylor*

*Shattuck Building, New York City
Carrère & Hastings*







THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, NEW YORK CITY
From the etching by Robert Wiseman

(Original, 10 x 7½ inches)

« ARCHITECTURE »